

雨木シュウスケ
●あまざしゅうすけ

第15回ファンタジア長編小説大賞
作「マテリアナイト 少女は巨人
と踊る」でデビュー。広島県在住。
特になにもないなーと思いながらカ
レンダーを見返してみたらトレーラ
ーハウスに泊まったり、海に行っ
たり、花火を見物したりと意外と普通
に夏をエンジョイしていたことに気
がついた。あ、禁煙も始めたよー。



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1-16
鋼殻のレギオス 16

雨木シュウスケ

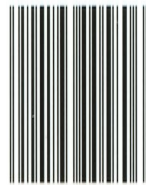


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富士見書房

鋼殻のレギオス16
スプリングバースト

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パートにはフェリやニーナ、クラーベルといった面々が引っ越し
てきて賑やかさを増す。仲間と過ごす毎日でレイフオンの傷も癒え
つつあったが、ヴァティー——世界の敵であるレヴァンティンの正体
を知るニーナとクラーベルは、その強大な力を前に、無力感に苛
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そんな中、ツエルニは新たな汚染獣の接近を感知する。偵察に
向かった第十七小隊だが、思いもよぬものを目にし——!

「まだ、きっと何かが起こります」

『世界の敵』となったツエルニを待つものは?!



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僕は……
知りたいです
——真実を。

世界の敵となったツエルニ。レイフオンが“戦う理由”は?!

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6

好評発売中!

Novel Illustrations

雨木シュウスケ
●あまぎしゅうすけ

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イラスト：深越
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スプリングバースト
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F

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レジェンド・オブ・レギオスⅠ リザヴィは光る
レジェンド・オブ・レギオスⅡ イグナシス覚醒
レジェンド・オブ・レギオスⅢ レギオス顕現

鋼殻のレギオス

CHROME SHELLLED REGIOS

16 スプリングバースト

なぜ放っているのか？

リーリンを暗殺しようという動きを





無数の鋼糸による極小の刺突の雨は

「ぬるいわ
うは儼の戦場だ」

老人の身体を貫くはずだった。

メイシェンがヴァティのために
切り分け持たせてくれた
ケーキを見つめる。

『美味しかった？』



Prologue: The Hermit's Awakening

The pair of icy cold eyes opened.

The stiffly closed lips parted. A breath flowed slowly. The soft sound became an airflow, making the air vibrant.

"Nina has left the plan. What's going on?"

The sound making the vibrant was low and heavy. A male's voice. The voice sounded dry like an eraser rubbing against something. Perhaps it had been a long time since he last spoke.

"That's an event difficult to judge," a female's delicate voice replied. "Zuellni obviously wants to act independently."

"In this kind of situation, a mere Electronic Fairy? Though the environment you arranged for her is very special....."

"It's still hard to decide if such an arrogant action should be stopped."

The slightly opened eyes widened, capturing the voice of that owner. It was a very beautiful half-bird, half human. The Electronic Fairy living in Senou City. She was the mother of all electronic fairies, Schneibel.

It was obvious that the type was different. The light Schneibel exuded seemed to be swallowing its surrounding darkness, but there was nothing in the depth of that darkness. It simply existed in this dimension.

Except the voice of the owner whose eyes were closed.

He was like a man carved from stones. There wasn't any redundant muscle. Each piece of muscle was smooth as if it was polished. He looked like an elder, but his skin was in contradiction. It even seemed to be bouncing off Schneibel's light. However, his hair was white, the same as his beard. The gaze from the slightly opened eyes was intense and sharp, as if another life was in this body.

A very strange old man.

As if he was some furniture. Just like a delicately carved piece of wood.

"She doesn't trust you."

"Is that so?"

Schneibel looked flustered at the old man's words, and then a bitter smile appeared on the old man's face. Wrinkles not of a human's showed up on the corner of the mouth. The dry voice broke.

"Let me ask you. What have you seen in that child?"

Moisture slowly seeped through that voice. The change was low-key, but the voice was strong.

"I don't know. I don't understand what she's thinking."

"Fu....."

The owner of the voice squinted, a smile through the eyes.

"As if that child is in her rebellious phase."

"And perhaps that is the case."

"Uh?"

"Since that child became independent, she has been having a deep relationship with things outside this world. She has already touched that darkness before she knew of my plan."

"And so her core has changed? Changes were happening that you weren't aware of?"

"Perhaps."

"Uh."

The old man's body was slowly changing.

Schneibel's light illuminated lustrous skin, skin that was moist like a human's. The tension between the two allowed no cracks, but now amidst it was a space. His joints moved. The old man's body was bathed in light, but the furniture-like texture of it began to return to life.

"Can I ask you to take action?" Schneibel asked, as if she was begging. The half bird, half man. One that looked yet not looked like a human being, but it had flesh. It was a half-life organism created by electrons. The master of all electronic fairies, Schneibel, was looking at the old man like a girl praying sincerely.

"Uh, I have to. I cannot not take action, but I don't know if the result will be like what you envision."

"That's.....?"

"I must confirm if Zuellni has pulled Nina into the wheel of fate."

"Then, you are really going to....."

"If she's in it, then I must take her back."

"Gill."

"She's necessary."

The old man stood.

He was no longer a dry and stony wooden statue. His gaze now suppressed the darkness, his skin had moisture like a human being's, and he exuded power and authority. His breath shook the air for a long time.

In here stood a warrior.

"I can't not investigate Zuellni's plan for you."

The old man stood, his heavy sigh continued. His golden Kei brushed apart the darkness. He stood as a fighter in front of Schneibel. His pose as he held red metal in his right hand no longer was that of a dry tree branch.

His presence was that of a domineering warrior.

Chapter 1: Adolescence and Strife

The sun of the spring season shone on the budding, tender leaves of the trees. Because the city moved according to where the filth monsters were, its seasons were irregular. However, the vegetation in the city, having undergone these extreme changes, were adaptable, and so this was what it looked like in spring.

The light was reflected back by the faint green tender leaves, making them appear gentler, exuding in Zuellni's air a sign of life. And the delayed enrollment ceremony ended in this atmosphere. New students began to get used to their new lives here.

The competition grounds. A place for official Military Artists in Zuellni for training. It was a very spacious area for the platoons. It had artificially made hills and forests, and sometimes even quagmire that would trap one's feet. If one were in a place filled with stone towers, then there would be a very intense aerial fight.

On that day was a special match. It wasn't a platoon match for a selenium mine in the Military Arts Competition between cities. It was a match on a smaller scale. The platoons matches took place a bit later than usual this year. Still, this year, one would see the strength of the new students and the senior students.

The match today took place for new students to understand how it worked. This policy was permitted by the new Student President Samiraya Miruke and the new Head of the Military Arts subject Gorneo Luckens.

There were many new students in the spectator stand as they had the priority seats. Big screens were set up by audience outside the grounds. Besides, one could also view it from his monitor in his own room. Most of the displays showed entertainment programs. Other than those programs, live-feeds of the

platoon matches were also very popular.

The platoons in today's match were the 14th and the 17th platoons.

But the outcome of the match could be seen in about 10 minutes after the match began. And in this high-speed match, the 10 minutes could seem very long.

Under the rule, the match would stop once the captain of the team was down.

Dalshena, under the cover provided by Sharnid, had entered the central fight while Nina was closing in on Shin with her Kei. The one on one fight was about to begin.

"Here she comes," Shin said, looking at the Dite in his hand. His weapon was an elegant sword, but the blade was bent in the middle. Originally, this was a weapon favorable for adaptable matches. Adding speed to the tip of the blade was its limit. As expected, its level of strength was a problem. If he were to use it against Nina's metal whips, his weapon would lose on its strength. And knowing that, he had avoided using techniques that meant pitting his strength against hers, but he was stretching it.

"Both of us were of about the same strength till now, but suddenly the distance between us has widened."

"Not really....."

Nina belonged to the 14th platoon before she set up the 17th platoon.

"Well, anyway. I'm glad to see my juniors growing up. That's the same for people who leave my side."

"....."

"Besides, we're just the decorations of this show."

Nina turned around at his words. The match wouldn't end if they didn't win against the captain of the opposing team. Shin's weapon was broken, but he himself still stood with no will of surrendering.

So the match hadn't ended.

But Nina had stopped moving, and Shin too. Both of their gazes were fixed in the middle of the field where the stone towers stood.

“Haha, is this all right?” Claribel was extremely happy. The Kochouenshiken gave off a bright light, affected by her Kei. Wearing the extra combat clothes from the 14th platoon, she looked like a missionary of the night.

Layfon stood a bit further from her on the top of a stone tower. In his hand was the Sapphire Dite.

“.....”

Layfon remained silent, confirming the wind coming into contact with his blade. Though feeling the slow, strong wind pressing down on him, he was still observing Claribel.

She looked very happy.

Of course. She came to Zuellni to fight him. It was without a doubt that she was happy about this match.

“You don’t feel like you’re letting down your guard like last time.”

Feeling like he was nailed.

Layfon didn’t give her a bitter smile as he continued to feel the wind on the blade. Claribel smiled at his attitude as she continued to raise the pressure of her Kei. She hadn’t made a move.

The wind howled behind her, raising as her Kei rose.

Claribel used Karen Kei, a type of Kei that used freedom as its principle. Layfon must not focus on his sole attention on her, so that he wouldn’t be surprised if there was a sudden attack from his back.

The wind. But he couldn’t feel the Kei from the wind. And so he could only watch. Was there another way?

The purpose of the Kei flowing from the Kochouenshiken was to confuse him.... He knew it for sure, but this confidence was dangerous for him. He couldn’t be confused by what he saw. He changed his original thinking and stopped reading the wind on his blade.

“..... Humph.”

Claribel stopped smiling. After understanding his action, a deeper smile appeared on her face.

“You really know how to fight.”

These were Layfon’s first words since the match began.

He felt like he was looking at a combination of Claribel’s smile and the Savaris from that time.

Claribel’s grandfather was Tigris, and her military arts master was Troyatte. She should also be acquainted with Savaris, but Layfon didn’t think those two had a deep relationship. He just felt that they were similar.

Perhaps those born of Grendan, wanting to fight, were all like that. But perhaps it might not have anything to do with the location. It could just be a simple smile that wanted a fight.

Probably the latter.

As a pretty girl, this smile appearing on Claribel’s face still made her cute. Conversely, the smile on Savaris’ face made the atmosphere tragic. But in terms of the threatening feeling created by it, Savaris’ was stronger.

“.....”

Claribel didn’t reply in case of a deceiving act in the fight.

Her outflow of Kei remained steady. The flame proudly wove around the Kochouenshiken. He could read nothing else but that. She wondered what he was planning by stalling for time. She wanted to think deeper but gave up. She just needed to wait for his attack then react. She kept this stance, her tension reaching its limit. She focused on her target.



“Then..... here I go.”

But Layfon reacted before he heard the words. He leaped. Her words were deceit.

He already felt the change when she said “then”. The stone tower beneath him was breaking. If he were to listen to everything and then evade her, that would have been too late for him.

Explosion. The shards of the stone beside Claribel’s feet became Kei and flew. To stop the predictable paths of the Kei bullets from being read, she was spinning in circles as she closed in on him.

When he came within reach, the Kei bullets shot for their target, but Layfon didn’t cut through them with his Sapphire Dite. He also didn’t release his Kei to strike them down..... his foot touched the ground and he jumped, taking advantage of the split second before the Kei bullets exploded to change his direction.

“Truly is...”

Claribel’s voice came to him in the explosion. It felt different from her position. This was also Karen Kei. He didn’t hesitate, knowing it was a trick. He kept heading in the direction he was feeling.

Yes, rely on his senses.

Layfon shot forward, ignoring the sharp Kei bullets speeding for him, and brushed past the right side of Claribel before a stone tower.

“Ah!”

Her expression twisted. At the same time, because of Layfon’s speed, the wind blew apart her figure.

An illusion.

Then came Layfon’s attack. The stone tower behind the illusion was cut into half. The upper part of it slid down, and behind it leaped Claribel.

“You saw through it!” her voice was full of joy.

But Layfon ignored the sound and the figure, kicking at the part of the stone

tower that was sliding down and changed his own direction again.

Right underneath him.

“What are you doing..... Ah!”

The rocks released by this action surprised Claribel. Something flew in between her head and body.

A fragment of the stone tower. A fragment that was the size of a fist shot through her and her figure disappeared.

Another illusion.

Then was Claribel’s real body standing at where he attacked?

No.

Layfon was heading straight for the ground but he maintained his speed. The Military Artists on the stand moaned, some held their breath as they saw he was about to crash.

But not so.

Just as he was about to crash, his figure vanished. The wind of his downward movement brushed the ground a little, and the dust circling his figure earlier dissipated.

“Uh?”

Even Claribel herself was surprised. She saw him disappearing from her hiding place.

Of course, she understood immediately. It was a misjudged movement.

Internal Kei variation – Fleeting Shadow. A Kei technique that made you judge incorrectly for a single moment. Because Layfon’s Kei was too strong, everyone thought he was still there descending.

Then where was he?

He had hidden himself. Claribel was the one ambushing him, but somehow she had lost her target and had become the target herself. She suppressed her feeling and increased her Sakkei as her gaze moved. She didn’t discover where he was hiding himself since he used Sakkei, but he was using Kei again, so he

must be hiding somewhere near.

No.....

It wasn't rational to go back in her conclusion. It was just that her body reacted quicker than her thoughts. She jumped out from her hiding place, the Kochouenshiken moving with the movement of her wrist.

The stone tower she was hiding in earlier collapsed in an instant. Sparks flew off the red Kochouenshiken blade as she received numerous cut paths. Layfon was right beside her. The green cut path of the Sapphire Dite brushed past her eyebrow. So very exciting. She was able to react in time because Sakkei allowed her to react faster than normal. Otherwise, she would have lost already.

Was it luck or her own strength? Claribel shivered, standing on this delicate boundary. She eliminated her Sakkei and released all of her Kei.

And Layfon reacted.

Suddenly, the whole field shook as the released Kei clashed.

At this time, Claribel thought fast. Where was Layfon hiding before? She herself was discovered because she was surprised by his technique Fleeting Shadow.

It was a strong illusion, so strong that not only her, but the audience were also deceived. She could tell from the sound coming from the stand. Even the Military Artists watching from afar fell for it. And Layfon had taken advantage of it. It was hard to wrap her mind around this precise skill.

But he maintained that while being able to appear right behind her? Was he luring her out using the technique? And so he found where she was at that split second when her Kei ebbed.

Could that be the case?

(My battle reactions aren't as sharp as his.)

This was the conclusion.

Karen Kei's strong point was illusion. Claribel had learned the Kei skill but was still slower than Layfon. Or could it be that she hadn't had the chance to show off her skill.

But Layfon did it. He had accurately grasped hold of the strengths and weaknesses of his techniques and used them accordingly. And so in order to confuse his opponent, he had used it.

“Then it’s close combat this time,” Claribel declared. No more illusions, but a real attack. She pressed down her body and threw herself into his embrace, swinging Kochouenshiken upward.

Layfon leaned back and evaded it. The Kei running up the blade destroyed its surroundings, and Layfon used his own Kei to reflect it. The two types of Kei clashed and threw off sparks.

The flaming sky turned one’s vision orange, but calm observation could see Layfon backing away as he reacted to her attacks.

They exchanged cut paths, the Kei from their body clashing against each other. The more Layfon’s Kei refused Claribel’s, the more Claribel’s Kei closed in on him. The two fighters’ fight was also like their Kei, the distance between them not shortening as they ran in the field.

“Tsk.”

The attacking side, Claribel, made an impatient noise. She hadn’t managed to shorten the gap by even one step, and Layfon was backing off while matching her speed, and she was unable to break apart his Kei. Besides, in his right hand..... He was holding his katana naturally. Claribel pressed on more.

In reality she was the attacker, but mentally, she was the one being pursued.

“.....”

Silently, Layfon focused on evading. He wasn’t holding anything back.

In terms of technique, he felt that hers and his were about the same. Her unyielding spirit was indeed taking a toll on his mentality, but she didn’t notice that because of her growing impatience.

Same as the fight with Haia, Layfon felt that the only difference was in their Kei. Everything else was about the same, including their mentality. Layfon fully knew well his own weaknesses. One shouldn’t involve one’s emotions in a fight. What mattered in a fight was the means, not the purpose. But what made a

good fight was to make the fight itself a purpose. Claribel was like that. Though he wasn't sure if that was her essence, it looked like it at this moment. Claribel came to Zuellni in order to fight him.

Did she like fighting?

She had the same smile on her when he reunited with her in Grendan.

But.....

“

“Why do you look like that?”

Anger burned in her eyes. The red of Kochouenshiken deepened. Using the time when her Kei changed, she pulled open the distance.

“You..... You're underestimating me!”

External Kei Karen Kei – Red Ripples.

As she shouted, red filled his vision. It wasn't just enveloping Layfon. The red exploded with Kochouenshiken as its center..... accurately speaking, red buried the entire stone tower field, then it bounded for Layfon like an unsteady monster heading for its prey.

Not that Claribel's Kei could do all that instantly. In order to confuse him, she had used the Karen Kei net hiding in the field. She hoped by using this hidden Kei, she could reach his level or even overcome him.

“Can you still keep that expression after this!!” she shouted, her shout transforming into a red beast's roar, sweeping towards Layfon.

“Tsk!”

Layfon didn't back off anymore, anxiety rolling off him. He readied his Sapphire Dite.

Psyharden Technique – Flame Cut.

“I know this technique!” Claribel shouted, a mad howl.

“Can you cut this Kei? Just you? Using that katana?!”

“

Silence. He kept his pose.

“Can you do that without a Heaven’s Blade?”

“.....”

He was still silent. He just held tightly to the handle of the blade, transferring the feel of it to his left hand. Karen Kei. Though the heat of the Kei was before him, its speed continued to rise.

He felt the heat in the sole of his boots. It was creeping towards him on the ground. Though its speed was slower, Layfon needed to concentrate to counter what was before him. Any opening on his part would mean receiving an attack.

Besides, he had nowhere to run to.

Pressed down by Claribel’s soundless aura, the red ripples were within his finger’s reach. The Kei he kept holding in shattered, cutting the world into another scene.

Boom.....

The sound coming from inside him.

Boom..... Boom.....

Karen Kei. It gave off this vibrating sound as its density rose. This pure voice was created from the soul of its creator.

Boom..... Boom.....

That was the sound of the Kei running on the Sapphire Dite.

Boom..... Boom.....

As the density rose, so too was the vibrating speed.

Boom, Boom.....Boom.....

The vibration was interfered with as the density rose.

This was the warning sign of the Sapphire Dite, warning that it was possible to reach a world beyond the reach of physics.

That was the wailing of metal.

Layfon opened his eyes after hearing it. His consciousness came back to the

fight, reorganizing the pictures into reality.

His face and hair were burnt. Smoke filled his vision. His body was like carbon. This wasn't a safe fight in an Academy City anymore. He was fighting for his life here.

He held the handle of the blade.

He felt the Kei moving regularly and stubbornly in his right hand. In his left he felt the Kei running in the blade. It was the moaning of a chain suppressing the power from running in a certain direction.

Let it go.

Release it.

His blade moved.

The blade slid down, its Kei resisting the Kei in his right hand and that released the Kei altogether, creating sparks, creating flame. But this was just the ripples. Everything was in the blade that was about to release its Kei.

To cut what? What could it cut? This wasn't just dependent on the sharpness of the blade. Layfon also had to think about his target, where and when to release it, and whether the cut path would work.

Before him.

Facing the heat, facing her discomfort, he painted the cut path.

The flame of the Karen Kei was annihilated, but the flash of blue didn't disappear. It cut the Karen Kei into two.

But this wasn't enough. This cut wasn't enough. The flame remained around her. Her fangs appeared before him once more. Just cutting the flame into two was meaningless.

But Layfon had no way to move. He didn't release the other two blades. Maintaining his guard and tension, he remained still as he looked for the traces of his blue wound.

The flame that was cut into two swayed, but not just in one direction. Judging from the whole picture, it should be attacking Layfon from all sides.

But that was what he wanted. The scene opposite him before the two flames. It was what he wanted.

He flipped his blade around.

And disappeared.

Heaven's Blade technique – Hazy Garret.

Trying to overcome the limit of physics, the Sapphire Dite wailed. And before the blade was the scene of the cut flame.

The unseen cut paths that were everything didn't just cut off the flame. They were also cutting off the Kei Claribel had laid out, hidden in the forest of stone towers, as well as the Kei connected to the Kochouenshiken.

The hidden Kei wasn't released all at once. And this Kei technique wasn't released like an explosion. One could understand by looking at the changes happening now. A change meant an existence that was being controlled. It wasn't a phenomenon of a destruction explosion. It was a power that was directed.

Layfon's invisible cut paths had cut off them, destroying the control of the red waves.

“Uh!”

Claribel wailed. A ringing sound from the Kochouenshiken and the blade itself shattered.

The heat controlling the red waves dissipated. The top corners of Hazy Garret cut apart the flame heading for Layfon. The remnants of flame were strong, flinging past the shield of Kei enveloping him.

The Sapphire Dite in his hand had lost its original color and had turned pure black, breaking apart like soil.

The capacity had overcome its limit, and it didn't even create an explosion that should have happened. Having lost the strength of its substance, it returned to dust.

Feeling empty of the lightness in his left hand, Layfon took a step forward.

The waves that had lost their controller caused the hidden Kei to transform into Karen Kei. This was a natural result of what should have waited to be slowly ignited.

And so came the explosion.

As expected, it expanded.

Layfon ran. He picked up Kochouenshiken and Claribel, who was lying on the ground, and increased his speed.

Psyharden technique – Reflecting Water Ferry.

“Ahhh.....”

He moved with extreme speed with Claribel under his arm, escaping from the forest of stone towers.

What followed was the sound of a huge detonation. A whirlwind of heat spiraled to the sky. Flecks of red dotted the blue sky. With his back to the scene, Layfon looked down at Claribel.

“It’s turned into something troublesome.”

“Hahaha.....”

Claribel’s cold voice continued after the explosion had died down.



And so the match ended.

“Ah, I’ve really learnt something,” Mifi breathed out the air she swallowed after watching the match.

Right now Mifi was watching the monitor in a restaurant, eating cakes and drinking tea. The rising steam from the porcelain cup was no more. As if having thought of something, she cut the cake with her fork, drank, and turned around.

“Uh? Ahah.”

At the counter was Meishen, who also breathed out and nodded with her hand on her chest.

Pieces of cake were placed in the glass container. From the basics to things Meishen owned, everything was so rich. These things sparkled like gems.

“Even so.....”

Mifi swiftly changed her gaze to look at her childhood friend, who was also cupping the tea cup that was no longer steaming.

“Is that all right? To really give up?”

“Uh? Well.....”

Naruki put down the cup and smiled bitterly.

“I don’t have the confidence to be in a fight like that.”

“Ahh, not all fights are like that. Besides, Layfon and that girl are special.”

“Special? That’s true, but.....”

“But?”

“Yeah. I know I don’t yet have the strength to be in a platoon. Besides, I still want to be a policewoman.”

“Even the police force needs strong Military Artists.”

“..... So to speak.”

Naruki’s gaze moved away, and Mifi couldn’t keep on talking about the same topic. She puffed out her cheeks. Anyway, Naruki had replied her, half-heartedly.

No, perhaps not so. She just didn’t know how to explain it well.

Many students from the Military Arts had changed since that day. Not only so. Mifi felt that the atmosphere of the entire Military Arts faculty had changed. Of course Mifi wasn’t the only one to notice this. Her other childhood friend, Meishen, anxiously watching them, must also feel the same.

Something must have happened on that day?

For those ordinary people waiting in the shelter could not comprehend their

experience.

It felt lonely and sad.

“But that isn’t so bad,” Mifi said, turning her gaze out the window. The door opened with the soft ring of the bell.

“I’ve finished delivering.”

“Ah..... thanks.”

Meishen replied with a smile.

The person coming in was a female student wearing an apron over her Zuellni uniform. The color of her hair ribbon was the same as last year’s Mifi’s.... meaning she was a first year. And she was also the only part timer in Meishen’s shop.

Students’ lives had also changed along with the passing of an academic year. Just like the change of classrooms and textbooks, people had also changed, and some students had moved to other places to live.

Layfon had taken the chance of being the unlucky one who had to leave his dormitory, along with other people – Nina, Felli, Claribel, Harley and Meishen, to move to an area slightly further away from the center of the Academy City, closer to the cargo district.

Meishen had renovated a part of the first floor of the apartment, opening her own shop to sell cakes. But this building was at the far end of the city. There were no customers. She had signed a contract with another shop so her cakes would be delivered to them. But she had opened a small eating area here, and that had become a resting place for others who lived in the same apartment.

And the part timer was Vati Len, who also lived in the same apartment.

“Even so, you don’t have to choose this place. I think there are other places that are more convenient.”

“I’m not used to living in a crowded place,” Vati calmly answered Mifi’s question. She was a girl without any emotions. No. Mifi could detect some very subtle expression changes. She wasn’t the same as Felli whose expression also remained the same.

To put it accurately, she probably wasn't good at speaking and laughing. Mifi was at first uncomfortable, wondering if she was really suitable for the job. Either way, even the shop owner, Meishen, also had a social phobia. She managed to sign the contract with the shop that she worked part time at last year, so basically she hadn't opened up any new market. Even so, Vati the part timer who delivered cakes was the face of the shop.

"You're a beauty. What a waste."

"Is that so?"

Vati cocked her head, not understanding.

Anyway, Mifi hadn't heard of any complaints from Meishen, so perhaps it was all right.

"It seems smooth."

"Uh? Um."

Meishen smiled.

"Ok. Let's go buy something for the celebrating and regretful parties."

"Ah, I've almost forgotten."

Naruki clapped her hands. Mifi had also remembered why she was here. It was natural for the 17th platoon to be here, and Claribel from the 14th platoon also lived here. Claribel had a good relationship with Meishen and the gang. Regardless of which side lost the match, they had decided to prepare a party for them.

There was no cake on Naruki's plate. The cup was also empty. Mifi finished her cake in a hurry and drained her cup.

"Then Vati-san, please look after the shop."

"Yes, I understand. And manager, please just call me Vati."

"Ah, yes. I'm sorry."

"It's all right."

"Uh, then I'm counting on you, Vati."

“Ok.”

Meishen took off her apron and leave with her friends, leaving behind Vati Len Nano-Celluloid Interface 1 Lævateinn.

“.....”

On the other side of the huge glass window, the three girls were heading for the tram station. According to their speed, they would arrive in 12 minutes and 13 seconds. There was no anticipated danger. The tram arrived at exactly the right time, and it would take it 5 minutes and 7 seconds to arrive at the shops. Based on her experience, it would take them another one hour to the location where they could resupply, which just matched the timetable of the tram. She speculated that they would return after 2 hours, 5 minutes and 5 seconds.

She had finished all the deliveries today. There was a 12% possibility of having new customers other than the residents living in this apartment. The students working in the cargo district hadn't dropped by much since the opening of the shop, and those few familiar customers didn't come everyday.

Vati washed the utensils the girls had used and started cleaning the shop. She would use this time to calculate the day's income and expenses. The original plan was that the cakes delivered to the shop would be the basic income, and so unless the shop suddenly cancelled the contract or that there was some problem with food storage, the number wouldn't go to red. The income was enough to cover the rent, electricity and gas fees, as well as other assorted expenses.

Not having to work in a rush and not having to worry because of work to be able to obtain such a result felt very fulfilling.

And.....

“Meishen Trinden,” Vati said.

Vati cleaned thoroughly, so thoroughly that there was no single flaw in the shop. It took her about 30 minutes to finish and so she had time to wait. She stood behind the counter, considering about that 12% of possibility and waited for her customers.

This was undoubtedly a waste of time, but Vati didn't feel painful. She just

waited quietly for the passage of time.

This was a feeling she hadn't had before.

It was a feeling Vati didn't have in her world. To explain further, she had had it before, but she couldn't feel it at the time after that, but because she had lost it once, she could feel it now.

Could she, such an existence, feel this? Not that Vati hadn't doubted, but she couldn't deny it in reality.

Speaking of which, what did it feel like for time to pass? Was she feeling this because she was acting upon the schedule she made? Or that a dimension with substance to it could feel the passage of time? Looking at it from another possible angle, the explanation of course belonged to the former.

On that side, time did not exist. If that was taken into account, quantifying time could not occur. Because of that physical gap between the two worlds, Durindana was created to guard that space, and Lævateinn existed to infiltrate the system, all of which was occurring in the timeless world. Perception of time in that world was merely a self-contained construct.

However in the world now, time is flowing. Just about everything is changing. Within the mechanism of that change, Lævateinn was to become Vati Len.

No, something, only one thing felt the flow of time.

For that reason, Lævateinn became Vati Len.

"She should be able to let me see it?"

The unfinished dialogue flowed from her mouth after a long while. Vati's gaze turned upward.

She could see from the window that Meishen and the girls were coming back with bags under their arms.

Chapter 2: Truth and Reality

Though he was used to it, Layfon still felt tense at the temperature that arose from what he saw.

This was Harley's alchemy lab.

Harley had also moved like Layfon after the changing of the year. He had been diligently furnishing the lab, but it seemed to be unfinished. Harley had been using the limited waste he had for now to make all sorts of convenient things.

Not that he had been kicked out of his old lab. Though the year had changed, the people in charge of the lab hadn't, and the two alchemy students before Layfon were looking at the broken Sapphire Dite.

Either way, only the handle was left.

"But this is the first time it's been damaged like this."

Harley's words weren't so tense as he was used to seeing the Sapphire Dite being damaged. But he was still speechless at the time just after the match when he first saw the extent of the damage.

"According to theory, it is a rare occurrence for a Dite to overload and explode, but that's become something normal recently. But this time really is the first."

"Ha....." Layfon wasn't sure what to say.

"I feel that the substance of this Dite must have deteriorated in one split second. Truly, it can't stand your maximum amount of Kei, as well as if you're to release your Kei suddenly. But to be damaged to this extent....."

"..... Just what kind of Kei were you using?"

Kirik, who had been silent for some time, said. To Layfon, the discontented eyes of Kirik were causing the temperature of the room to rise.



Layfon found Harley impressive, as he was able to ignore that gaze.

“Uh?”

“Your use of Kei. Has it changed? If not, the Dite shouldn't have been damaged like this.”

“Uh, yes. Well.....”

How should he explain it?

She thought he was training on the street. He was training, but it wasn't platoon training. It was individual. But it was a bit different from that of a normal Military Artist. He would maintain his level of physical movement in platoon training. When he was training alone, he trained his Kei.

Back then, Nina had collapsed because of over-exhausting her Kei vein. Layfon had suggested that they should rest their Kei. Meanwhile, they trained to maximize their amount of Sakkei and increase the capacity of their Kei vein. This made up the basics of Kei training.

Most of the Military Artists trained their physical movements and Kei at the same time. This was normal.

One time, he suggested to include his type of training in the platoon training, but both Nina and Sharnid and the others didn't give it a very good evaluation. They concluded it didn't feel like the normal training they usually had.

“How should I say it. Once I poured as much Kei as I could into it, the Dite exploded. So I must let the Kei run as I pour it in.....”

It was different from that training. Layfon.....

Had lost his Heaven's Blade. He had naturally thought of that problem even when he was not a Military Artist in Zuellni. This problem couldn't just be solved by technicians like Harley. One must also consider how to solve it through the Military Artist himself. How a Military Artist's Kei was poured through the entire Dite would create different level of damages. It was the job of directing the insubstantial Kei through the Dite.

A normal Military Artist would do this type of training – pouring Kei through

the Dite to learn to control the Kei. But Layfon couldn't pour all of his Kei in because of his different amount of Kei.

“What does that mean?” Harley showed a confused expression. Kirik was also frowning.

“So it wouldn't explode if you save the Kei in the Dite? So first let the Kei in the Dite out, wait a bit, then pour more in.....”

“.....Kirik, do you get him?”

“Like the use of hidden Kei in Karen Kei?”

“Yes yes, just like that.”

Hidden Kei was like a firework that could explode at any time once it touched fire. But the Kei that came out of it couldn't be changed. What Layfon said was similar but there was something different.

“But this is Sapphire, not like Ruby..... According to the way you did it, you were accumulating, piling up the ‘explosion’ till it exploded, weren't you?”

“Well..... Yeah.”

“.....How reckless.”

“Hahaha.”

Kirik was shocked. Even Layfon couldn't laugh about it.

“.....I can't quite understand it in depth, but that's probably how Kei runs through the Dite.”

“Yeah.”

Kirik nodded.

“But that can't really explain this level of damage. Uh, but there aren't many similar examples previously. Ah, but that isn't the problem right now. Till now, the problem is to strengthen the raw materials, meaning we have to do more strengthening this time.”

“I'm sorry.”

“No, besides, it's easier to do it that way. It must be. I think.”

Harley said weakly, but he didn't look pessimistic. He was becoming more positive.

“Uh, Layfon, you still have to come for experiments. Is that OK?”

“Yes. Please look after me.”

“Then, we'll put the Sapphire Dite here for now. Is it fine to only use the Shim Adamantium Dite for now? I'll give you the Steel Threads when you need it.”

“Ok.”

Layfon answered clearly and left the lab.

“.....”

Kirik shook his head.

“What is it?”

“No.....that guy, he's changed?”

“He seems to have thought through something recently.”

“Thought through.”

Kirik thought about it. Layfon had shown them he was moving forward from the time when he started holding the katana. Though Layfon had had a happy and carefree appearance, Kirik had looked at him coldly. A normal person would just have been trapped inside the problem. In fact, Layfon had tripped over it. Under the usual attack of filth monsters, the nearness of Grendan, and the continuous unusual changes, Layfon's spirit had been trapped deeply.

In reality, Kirik had not seen the Layfon then. Kirik was an alchemy student and he had lots of things to do. Many Military Artists' Dites had broken because of that chaos. And so repairing Dites wasn't just the usual normal job of repairing a Dite. In the Academy City, everyone was doing all he could to help rebuild the city.

“Isn't that good?”

“True.”

But that time had passed. They had finished rebuilding the city. They had peacefully enrolled the new students and the new year had begun. And so Kirik

could also continue his studies. At the same time, a new issue had appeared. It was worth doing.

“That guy could think of such a way once he's in the mind for it. But he doesn't seem to have completed it yet. It must have come from the accumulated training and thinking he did before. If that's not the case, then he's not a genius, he's a monster.”

“Well, yeah, that's possible.”

“But what causes him to be like he is now is something else.”

Yes. This time Layfon wasn't getting carried away. Had he calmed down after being beaten down? Or had he seen something else? The Katana that was barred from him was now unsealed. Kirik didn't know what he had gone through. Perhaps he now felt thankful for the burden that was lifted off him. Perhaps he had rebounded from the springboard.

But this time was different. It was surely different. He didn't look as excited as that time.

“..... Either way.”

Harley was already thinking about the electrical paths inside the Dite.

“The amusingly energetic guy really disgusts me,” Kirik said.

“You just said something awful.”

Kirik ignored him and concentrated on the problem before him. Personality had nothing to do with him. As long as the personality wasn't bad, there was nothing else to consider. He was happy that what he created had been wielded by the best person and that it had made the best result. And not only that, but he was stepping up the level. Was the thing surpassing the person or the person surpassing the thing? Right now, the person was winning. And one day, Kirik would surpass that.

Recently, he had really been having that kind of feeling.



“Ah.”

“Ah.”

He met Felli on the way back to the Training Complex.

“What's it?”

“Uh? No. Nothing much.”

Felli couldn't help but glare at him angrily, looking at his excited expression.

“Really?”

So suspicious.

Though he was confused, he somehow understood why she was angry.

He was wearing the Military Arts uniform.

Felli had told him that she was going to drop out of Military Arts when the new year began. At that time she sounded really serious. She wasn't lying. But now that she was in her third year she was still wearing the Military Arts uniform.

And she was still in the 17th platoon.

The Student Council hadn't interfered, but.....

“Speaking of which, how is that going?” Layfon asked as they walked back to the Training Complex together.

“A strong opponent that makes me really angry.”

Felli's mind was full of Delbone's inheritance. It was sealed and so if Felli didn't unseal it, she would never know what was inside. And so she had given up changing to General Studies.

“And what has become of the Dite?”

“Well.....” He told her what had happened.

“Anyway, they've to make a new one first.”

“Yeah.”

“So you still can't use your full strength, but in terms of capacity, you're handling the Dite better.”

“But..... can that really work?”

“And why do you think it can't work?”

Layfon couldn't quite answer her.

“But I'm sure it's working out,” Felli had said on that night.

“Uh?”

“If it had ended that way, there's no reason for abandoning you.”

“.....”

As if she was digging at his wound. And she didn't stop.

“I'm sure it's not done yet.”

“.....The captain.....?”

Did she know? And she wasn't saying anything?

Nina had said in Grendan that it had something to do with her. She had suddenly vanished from Zuellni and then suddenly appeared. This was also connected to the mystery. And there was also Dixerio Maskane, the person opposing the Wolf Faces. The hope that the Electronic Fairies yearned for. The mystery that created this world and the royal families of Grendan. Even Nina herself couldn't understand so many things.

And in reality what was her connection with the Wolf Faces? Even Layfon and the others became involved in that fight, and Nina had felt terrified about it. Could she think of this world as another dimension? If that was the case, then during that fight at Grendan and Zuellni, every Military Artist in both cities had become involved in the fight between Nina and the Wolf Faces.

But things hadn't become as bad yet.

Nina hadn't said anything about it from that day on. She hadn't disappeared once again like the time when the filth monsters attacked Zuellni. What Layfon wanted when he entered the Academy, the peaceful days, had come.

Layfon felt from deep inside his heart that these peaceful days couldn't continue forever.

"I don't know."

Felli shook her head.

"Even if she knows something, she wouldn't tell us."

".....Yes."

Nina was like that. When something happened, she wouldn't tell them immediately. Instead, she thought about it herself then tried to solve it herself.

"In that case....."

It wasn't possible to ask her when they had no evidence, asking her to open her heart to them.

"What should we do?" Felli cut through his haze and brought him back to the decision.

"Uh?"

"She's keeping her silence, so we can think Zuellni's is safe for now. And so about that vent and the fight, the central problem is still Grendan, not here."

"....."

"It's safe here. If so, we don't have to do anything special."

He knew even though she hadn't said it. This had something to do with Nina.

According to Felli, Leerin abandoned Layfon in order to not get him involved.

And that also proved that Zuellni was safe.

What Felli was asking was – is this OK?

".....Certainly, it's not good."

He had no confidence in the words he forced out of his mouth.

"In here. It must..... not be good."

But he couldn't say anything more after that.

He didn't know what to do. Should he return to Grendan? And what if Leerin

rejected him again? The Queen was beside her. And why was she saying she was of the royal family? If so, next time, all of the Heaven's Blade successors might become his enemies. That must be it. And what was he to do then? Fight with all his strength? Or not through violence, but using other ways to convey his feelings? And what if he was still rejected?

If he had gone without thinking about this, then nothing was solved. But he had no other ideas.

Wasn't there something he could do?

Leerin judged he could do nothing, and that was why she rejected him. This was the conclusion Layfon came to after some consideration. He had always thought he was an excellent Military Artist.

But whether it was Nina or Leerin. None of them had relied on him.

Didn't that mean he could do nothing?

"I think this can help."

Felli said. She lifted her face to look at him and pointed at her head.

"The inheritance from Delbone is data. It may be battle experience or....."

"Memories?"

True. Delbone already had in her hand the battle data of all of Grendan when Layfon was still in that city. It was more appropriate to say she had been watching over the entire Grendan. The Queen also trusted her. Perhaps she might have held secrets to Grendan that no one else knew.

"Perhaps. But the seal is still intact, so this speculation isn't certain yet."

Layfon didn't reply.

"But that's all we have now. Is there anything else?"

".....No."

"Then this is all I can rely on," she said and looked at him.

"Excuse.....?"

"What should I do?"

“Uh?”

“According to my prediction, I need to use all of my strength to unseal the data. I can abandon Military Arts and transfer to General Studies, then find my future while trying to unseal this. I can graduate with this kind of vague attitude, but that will take a long time.”

“No way.....”

“Decide.”

“Uh?”

“You decide.”

“Why, why me.....”

He was completely overwhelmed under her crystal clear gaze.

“To tell the truth, if the captain is hiding something next time, I won't care what happens to her next.”

In Layfon's sister's home at Grendan, Nina had persuaded Felli and Sharnid. At that time, both Felli and Sharnid appeared calm, but in reality they were really angry. That was Layfon's conclusion. At that time Layfon wasn't calm at all as he hadn't had time to think about the thing happening between him and Leerin.

“Personally I'm curious about Grendan, but no one has asked for my help and so I'm not all that motivated. No one would say that is my own problem. I think so too. If I don't want to get involved, I can just ignore this.”

“.....”

“What about you?”

She threw the question at him.

“What will you do? You have a deeper connection to this problem than me. Only you have the motivation to make a move. If the captain rejects us, I can only help you. So what do you think?”

“I.....”

He didn't know. But he knew this wouldn't cut it. To leave the issue because he didn't know anything would mean he was unable to move forward. He had

experienced this already and so he didn't want to be like this again. Even though he didn't know anything, he must do something. Whether it looked silly, whether it was a failure.

He must find out.

A voice from deep inside his heart said – I want to do it.

“I..... want to know.”

He had said it. At that time, on that night, at that place.

And so Felli was still wearing the Military Arts uniform.

“What is it? You're suddenly silent.”

“Ah, no. I'm thinking..... it's still not good for senpai.....” Layfon replied as he repeated thought of what happened that night.

“Ah?”

Felli stopped moving.

“What do you mean?”

“Ah, well..... a setback to your future just because of me.....”

“.....”

“Excuse me.”

Felli sighed softly.

“What's wrong..... Is there a problem with your head?” she asked.

“Uh?”

“Uh, like when you got hit during training.”

“Ah? No. I'm fine. The diagnosis I took at the clinic says so.....”

“No, that's not it. If your head is hit you wouldn't be able to process information at high speed. Didn't the move you used earlier exhibit such speed? Water Mirror right?”

“Yes, that's that kind of a move.”

“That's why you've some problem with your brain. Normally a Military Artist's brain is more muscular than an average person's, but it shouldn't be able to sustain such a speed. The blood is suppressed on the back of the brain. Many of your brain cells should have died.”

“If that happened, I should be here. I'm not sure what's happening.”

“That's because you're usually using only one layer of the brain..... meaning if you're awoken, then you can do anything. So please be more diligent at awakening yourself. Please do it fast. Immediately. Now.”

“I'm sorry. Forgive me.”

He wasn't sure what was happening, but it was a fact that she was angry.

Felli sighed again.

“Then bend down.”

“Uh?”

“Hurry.”

“Yes.”

“More, and move ahead a bit.”

“Is this ok?”

“Uh, then don't move.”

He was standing, bending his back with his hands on the ground. There was no one else around them, but he didn't want to be like this for a long period of time.

It was really embarrassing.

“What are.....”

“Don't talk.”

He couldn't see her, but he knew from the flow of the air and the sound. Felli's hand went to his waist and took something. The Dite?



“.....”

A soft voice. Did she restore it?

The shadow on the ground expanded. Something shining brightly just above his head. She really did restore the Dite.....

Tang.

A heavy blow to the back of his head. Stars flew in his vision.

“Um, ah.....”

He couldn't speak. Pain conquered the back of his head. He rolled on the ground at the pain. This was way more than the usual kick she did to him. Intense pain ran in his head.

“What, what were you.....?”

He said but had already rolled three circles on the ground.

“..... How can you be so stupid.”

She regarded with him an icy gaze.

“I'm too stupid. Sorry.”

He used internal Kei to reduce the pain in the back of his head as he looked at him.

“Your apology still can't make me feel better. I move according to your decision. What about you? Do you feel that my judgment is wrong?”

“Um.....”

“Don't make me repeat this again. You're so annoying.”

“So, sorry.”

“Anyway, I'll try to unseal that data quickly. So please do the best of what you can do for now.”

He still had to wait for Harley to finish the Dite though. Meanwhile, he wanted to complete the move he used in the fight with Claribel. Speaking of which, if the quality of the Dite could increase, then that should complete his move..... probably.

“If the captain can tell us something this time, then everything will be simpler.”

“Yes, yes.”

Felli seemed to feel better and so they continued on to the Training Complex.



She had been careless. The area of her stomach felt heavy.

“Um.....”

Exhaustion came with hunger. Nina sighed deeply. It was good that no one else was around. Only she was inside the special room of the 17th platoon in the Training Complex. The platoon training was finished. Everyone else had gone home.

She couldn't know what was happening outside. Perhaps the sun was already setting. The Training Complex was about to close. If she hadn't applied for the room, the security staff would ask her to leave.

And what now? She didn't have work tonight at the Mechanical Department. She could still train on her own. Should she go to the suburb of the Engineering Faculty where her old dormitory was to train? Or head back to the vicinity of her new home? She had found a spacious area near it that was suitable for training.

Today she had no choice to head back yet.

She had to train and had to become stronger. This thought was much more intense than in the past. She urged herself day by day. To be stronger. To become stronger.

This was no longer the naïve dream of a girl who was born a Military Artist. This wasn't also the burning mission of a Military Artist. To put it more accurately, this was the horror of someone being chased.

Slight sweat in her palm as she held the Metal Whips. She couldn't tell if this was from her training or from the sense of horror.

If she didn't become stronger..... stronger, stronger.....

As her brain kept swirling, her movement stopped.

In reality she was standing in the middle of training room, dazed and lost, holding the two Metal Whips that reached the floor.

No Kei was running. No burning morals. The overwhelmed air weaved around her as she thought deeper and deeper.

Dohdoh.

Someone was knocking on the door.

It was Claribel. Just like Nina, she showed an exhausted and bitter smile.

“You really are still here. Want to get a cup of tea with me?”

“Ah, good.....”

Nina headed for Claribel and realized she was still holding the Metal Whips.

“.....If I asked you what your worries are now, I would really be ignoring the ways of the world.”

After that, they had tidied up the room of Dites and assorted things, then had gone to take a shower. If Claribel hadn't come to help, Nina would have taken more time tidying things up. After the shower came the closing time, and so the two of them were kicked out of the Training Complex.

They were at the resting area somewhere near the Training Complex, beside the vending machines. Military Artists gathered here most of the time. The vending machines sold both drinks and fast food.

But the two of them only chose some sports drinks and went to sit down on a long bench.

The sun was slowly setting. Crimson mixed with darkness, painting an error scene.

“Just what is it?” Claribel said softly. Nina wasn't surprised, because she was the same. Both of them had noticed the existence of that thing, and horror had infected them.

Claribel was part the royal families. She was the closest to the mysteries of

this world. She had fought the Wolf Faces and had experienced something even more otherworldly than Nina.

That existence showed that the nightmarish battle in Grendan had ended as a loss.

“But what are they planning?”

That was Claribel's question. Nina couldn't reply. She wasn't comfortable with the cold sports drink. She should have chosen the hot drink and so began eyeing the vending machine.

They must defeat the person named Vati Len, the one who indifferently infiltrated Zuellni as a General Studies student.

“That is the same as the monster that attacked Grendan.....”

“Yes. They smell the same. Don't understand?”

“.....”

She didn't reply. Not because she didn't understand, and not because she didn't want to admit it. Because she couldn't quite explain it. She felt that they were the same, but there was no evidence to explain why it was here.

But she felt that they were the same.

And the Haikizoku Melnisc inside her called that person – Lævateinn.

“Lævateinn,” Claribel said. Nina had talked about it with her on that night. On that night when she ran into the flustered Claribel. The two of them had talked and forgotten the time. They were shocked.

“If we were in Grendan there should be a way to investigate her. But in here we don't know anything. Can you move between cities through En?”

“No. And I don't know how.”

She only did it once. But that wasn't because of her will. It happened during the Haikizoku incident. She was moved to another Academy City to fight the Wolf Faces. She wasn't sure how to return.

“And even if we can do it we must borrow the Electronic Fairies' power right? Then perhaps it isn't possible right now.”

“We've become the enemy of the entire world. Can we do nothing.....”

After meeting Vati, they had talked with Zuellni and Schneibel.

Zuellni didn't want to say anything, and for that Schneibel was furious, and announced that the Academy City Zuellni had become the enemy of the entire world.

She had said everything.

Nina had said it all, and she hadn't even told her platoon members about it.

Because Claribel's experience was like hers, and was on the same battlefield. With the blood of the royal family, Claribel understood that the world was moving and knew about the fight with the Wolf Faces, and instinctively felt their threat.

And so Nina had told her.

Anyway, Vati was a threat. If she tried something with Vati, the entire city would be destroyed. But things would have been easy if her strength was about the same as that monster that appeared in Grendan, or even surpassed it.

“.....In reality, if I won against Layfon in that last fight, I was thinking of telling him everything.”

“?!”

Nina looked at her in surprise at the unexpected confession.

“Though his Dite is a problem, but I didn't anticipate his thinking. But now I can see it, so if I win on this basis, doesn't that mean I'll have grown? So with his help and that fight, I'll be growing more?”

“Uh.....”

“..... To take it a step more, winning or losing matters not. In fact, we need his help. Till now, he's the strongest in this city.”

“But.....”

If Vati found out about it.

“Yes, I understand. In Grendan all of the Heaven's Blades would fight, including the honored Queen..... I really feel that we won just by a margin.

There's no meaning to add Layfon in there. Besides, that person isn't good at lying. To live close to someone like that, it's impossible to live pretending we know nothing.”

Even Nina was the same.

She felt tense and suppressed every time she returned to the residence. What came was deep regret – how could she have neglected her friends? But Layfon was living there. And like the flow of the air, Felli, Harley, Claribel, Layfon's friends moved in one by one. Since this was the case, Nina couldn't just run away by herself. If anything happened, she must do her best to protect them.

“I must become stronger.”

“Yes, become stronger.”

And so that was their conclusion.

But she still felt painful. Despair assaulted her and she shivered every time she thought of Vati.

Despair.

Yes. There was no other feeling. In Grendan, the monster was big enough to cover the entire city. Nina felt scared before this extraordinary monster, but she didn't plan to escape. Still, when she stood in front of Vati, she could only feel despair.

Vati looked just like a girl, but she was much scarier than that monster in Grendan. Nina knew she couldn't win. Only Claribel could fight with that level of terror.

Nina might have thought of some excuses if Claribel wasn't here.

“What can I do? I can accompany you if we're training.”

“Well..... can you just be with me?”

“Sure. It's my pleasure.”

Then the two of them ran to the engineering area and started training.

They fought a few rounds and took a break. Nina's thoughts flowed to the old dormitory she lived in before.

No one was living there now. Leu had become the Vice President, and the dormitory head had become the Head of the Alchemy Department and so had left the dormitory because of her busy schedule. Nina and Claribel, who used to live there temporarily, had moved out with the others. Now no one lived there. It seemed the old dormitory head hadn't released the contract yet because she still had luggage there. But she wasn't living there, so the place must still be empty.

Many changes had appeared, and that was the same for the old dormitory, as well as for Naruki, who had left the 17th platoon. As a senpai, Nina was grateful for having done all she could to help Naruki grow, and so she didn't want to stop her from realizing her goal.

The world was in crisis. They couldn't just leave it. They must use everything they could..... That thought had flowed through her, but she mustn't let it tie her down.

This was the Academy City.

People came here to chase their dream.

This was the Academy City. The Electronic Fairy Zuellni protected the students who came for their dreams. Nina liked that Zuellni.

And that was why she wanted to protect Naruki.

But what was Zuellni thinking now? She had no idea. Zuellni had used her power for Nina's Dite, but she had also accepted the enemy – Vati.

The people of this world survived through the city's movements that evaded filth monsters. No, making the filth monsters avoid the people. Seasons changed along with the changing route of a city. A city survived by relying on the selenium mines.

Humans survived according to the environment brought by the city.

And still the Academy City hadn't changed.

Humans couldn't resist the decision of the Electronic Fairies, the will of Regios. Electronic Fairies and Regios weren't made by the current humans, and so no one had been able to replicate and control them successfully.

Regios moved around to avoid having disaster befall the people. At the same time, people couldn't escape from the situation brought by the cities.

Zuellni, Electronic Fairy, what kind of a situation was she bringing to the Academy City?

“Time to head back?”

The night was nigh. Though it wasn't a cold season, their breath was white.

“Yes.”

Nina nodded.

“Ah – I didn't write anything down, but Layfon would have left dinner for us.”

They ate dinner together in the residence. “Because they all knew each other”. Layfon and Meishen were the main cooks. They had placed a notice board above the mail boxes, so they would cook according to the number of people written on it.

“I didn't write anything either. I'd be very thankful if he did leave something.”

“Yeah. I have no strength to make dinner. I don't have the strength to go back, have a shower and come back out.”

“..... Then, shall we eat and then return?”

“Uh. I do anticipate Layfon's meal though.....”

“Can we trust him?”

She stood up.

Perhaps Felli, Harley and Layfon were still there if they returned now. Though it wasn't that they had just moved in, but they didn't seem to plan to put too many things in the house. Nina would breathe a sigh of relief as long as she saw them there.

(That's a big help.)

She would feel that her heart was saved as long as they were there. But if they knew what she was thinking.... Perhaps everything would then end.

“I wonder what's for dinner?”

“Let me make this clear, whether there's dinner is a question.”

“True.”

They smiled bitterly with a hand on their stomach and walked in the night of the Academy City.

(Even if that's the case.)

“Ahah, but I still wanted to win that last fight.”

“Isn't it good to have a bigger goal?”

(If I can protect everything, then that's fine too.)



“.....”

In the silent room, Vati sat alone on the sofa. Having considered that she might have visitors, she had furnished the room with the basic level of furniture needed. But it didn't seem those things had been used, and so the air of emptiness that was present in Layfon's room was also here. Vati was an existence different from humans, and so all she had here were really extremely basic. There was not even a tiny bit that suggested a person living here.

Right now, she was monitoring the two people who probably knew of her true identity.

Nina Antalk and Claribel Ronsmier.

After listening to their conversation and confirming that there wasn't anything she needed to take note of, she moved her concentration away from them.

What made up Vati's body were groups of mechanisms called nano-cells. Not only had they made up her body, they were even now collecting information in the Academy City and its vicinity.

Vati wasn't just keeping track of Nina and Claribel, but everyone else. And she was watching their interactions.

She watched the laughter in the prosperous streets, the conflict in the playground, the sadness in the park. She noticed the smile on the single bed, the uneasy shivering, the expression of one with his hands balled into fists. She took note of the interweaving emotions of millions of people, the feelings that came from their interaction, the expressions of people brushing shoulders.

She was watching the people here.

Only two of them realized Vati's true identity, and also the Electronic Fairies who sustained the human population. But that wasn't a big problem. The Electronic Fairy inside Nina also judged that a chance of winning against her was very low, so it hadn't made a move. Besides, there was also one person of interest – Claribel Ronsmier. Compared to the ancestors who had had their bodies altered for fights, she was a closer existence than them. That may have explained why Claribel realized Vati was something different, because her ancestors had a connection with Vati.

“.....”

She looked at the sky. Her gaze wasn't directed at the window as the curtain there had blocked out the outside scenery.

Her gaze was the gaze of the nanomachines outside her residence.

The sky that shone with the light of the moon.

Vati was looking at the moon.

“Airen.”

It was the name of the moon. He was the ancestor of this world, and the final fortress that defended it.

“Airen Garfield.”

She was calling his name. When the strange changes happened in the original world, the changes gave rise to the Zero Territory. Airen's sister was swallowed, and so he had joined the plan like an experimental animal. And that man had discovered that existence, the Saya who bore a striking resemblance to his sister.

Because that man was the lucky survivor, his reality of being human was

ended.

Vati was born after that incident, but her creator had a deep connection to Airen. And that connection was related to the appearance of Vati in human form.

So.....

“.....”

Not thinking of the past anymore, she observed the moon again. She couldn't tell from here of any changes on the moon. But in reality, the moon was in disarray.

After Durindana had descended to Grendan, Vati had taken the opportunity to move in. The seal placed on the moon, giving the moon its role, had already come apart. Nay, it wouldn't have been an exaggeration to say it crumbled. Because it couldn't abandon its host, Kalivan had stayed on that side.

After that, this world was being destroyed, and things that vanished from this side ended up in the old world. If that were only the case, disruption wouldn't be a bad recourse either.

But.....

“.....”

Vati didn't do that. She had put down her mission as Nano-Celluloid Interface 1 Lævateinn, and was instead living in the Academy City Zuellni as a student. If she was asked why, she would reply with silence or with “sometimes I want to know too” as a response.

Apart from that she would make no reply. She didn't think Kalivan and Durindana would understand even if she told them the reason.

Those who sustained their master Ignasis and were multiplying - the souls who should have dissolved in this world but were being active in the Zero Territory..... Of course these Wolf Faces wouldn't understand her either.

That was why she had to eliminate the Wolf Faces. Their mission had ended. They weren't needed anymore. Besides, since they didn't understand Vati's purpose, they might bring her trouble.

“What you understand, I don't,” she said to the moon.

The first time Vati saw him was when he was the bodyguard of that violent organization. He was carrying out his investigation in the guise of a bodyguard. He infiltrated the Zero Territory and became a different human being, and he was the enemy of the organization that Vati's master belonged to. A strange human being..... to Vati, who was made to counter him, Airen shouldn't have been difficult opponent.

But he had made the first move. And so Vati was in a desperate situation. It was ridiculous that she needed help.

That connection she had with him stayed with her until the old world collapsed.

And that connection was still here, even now.

“You've made me doubt. If the world you protect can't show me the answer, then I won't acknowledge you.”

She was talking to the moon. Of course, there wouldn't be an answer. And Vati's words couldn't be able to reach the moon.

The words of the moon shouldn't be able to reach her either. Vati couldn't return to that world until she destroyed this world.

“.....”

She knew there wouldn't be a response even if she spoke, but she still did so. She quickly checked her body. There was nothing unusual.

But she didn't know why she said those words out loud, and she didn't know why the moon might confirm her thinking.

She hadn't spoken aloud for a long time before she came to the Academy City. Was she naturally wanting to experience it again? She made such a choice but she wanted to lean on the reason behind it. This was incomprehensible.

Her ability to simulate a real human being was rising continuously. She concluded and moved her gaze.

On the counter was a cake inside a wrapped container.

Meishen's cake. She was making one to two new cakes every week as a challenge. If she made a cake, she would share it with everyone living here. Almost all of the people here ate in Layfon's or Meishen's room. Even though Vati was invited, she declined the offer.

It would be troublesome if she ended up breaking that delicate balance between her and Nina and Claribel. She wouldn't meet with them unless she really had to.

It would be inconvenient to explain herself when there were too many people around.

And so Meishen had brought Vati's share over here.

Vati looked at the cake.

It seemed the cake was covered with cream, and it was decorated with fruit, like a traditional cake. Vati stood up with the sofa and took up the fork. She started eating the cake at the counter.

There was no need for dinner. Her energy came from the aurora atoms that were suffused with the pollutants. The nanomachines spreading outside the city provided her with energy. But she could simulate eating. It would be a waste if she didn't eat it. Sometimes she wanted to just throw it away, but considering that she might be found out, and that her relationship with Meishen might worsen because of it, she decided to eat the cake.

The fork delivered the cake to her mouth. The cake hiding inside the cream had in it different types of fruit. It was the usual way to make a cake, but the choice of fruit and their combination was different. Vati analyzed the ingredients in the cake that was in her mouth. What was that ingredient that she almost missed? In fact, if she reported to Meishen that there were no herbs in it, Meishen would have been very surprised.

But there was a question that Vati couldn't answer.

“Is it good?”

The question that she was given after finishing the cake made her speechless. She swallowed “I can't answer it” and pretended the cake was delicious.

In fact, she couldn't say "I can't answer it". That was why she had been analyzing the ingredients of the cake and trying to discern that elusive taste. She didn't want to act differently from a normal part timer and have to look for another job.

Vati judged that she had no time to observe other targets, so she would observe Meishen Trinden.

"....."

Silently eating the cake. Finishing the analysis. If she had all the ingredients, she should be able to make the cake herself.

"Is it good?"

But looking at Meishen's smiling face as she asked the question, Vati couldn't give voice to her true feelings.



Whoa, she thought.

She was in the school in Grendan. After returning from Zuellni, Leerin had taken up her studies again and was now strolling in the courtyard.

In this place were special departments for education and senior researchers, so the land was spacious. There were lawns, benches and a small-scale sports ground here. There was also a library and other indoor facilities, so the students didn't have to worry about having nothing to do.

It was lunch. Leerin detached herself from the crowd of students rushing to the canteen, and came to the courtyard. There was nothing in her hands. It was lunchtime, but she was relaxing here. This wasn't like her, and so she was exposed.

The "whoa" was for that reason.

"What are you doing?"

Before she heard the question, she saw the two figures crouching on the

lawn.

“Ah”

Of the two, one wore an awkward expression after looking in her direction. With a figure of a dead branch, she was a woman who exuded an inexplicable intensity.

“Rever, hey Rever.”

The girl seemed to be in a fluster as she called out at the person who had his back to Leerin.

The person being called was just the opposite of that girl. He was shorter and fat. With the back bent as he looked at the ground, he looked as cute as a huge animal.

“Keep going! Keep going!” he said in a small voice, ignoring her call.

Leerin heard him and looked down.

There seemed to be something. She looked closer and saw a piece of food debris on the grass. He must have dropped it. And surrounding that food debris was.....

“Ants?”

Leerin said. The taller girl standing beside her had a difficult expression on her face, which was quite rare to see. To Leerin, this girl could have everything she wanted whenever she wanted, and so to have that expression on her wasn't usual.

“Rever, he never notices anything around him once he's concentrating on something.”

She looked embarrassed, but she took pride in him. Leerin could tell from the way she called him.

The ants were busy taking the piece apart and carrying the parts back to their nest. The army of ants stretched out from the nest, crowding around the food debris and then lining back to the nest. The delivery process was organized like a machine.

“Keep going! Keep going!”

Reverse stared at the ants, supporting them with his back bent. This was high level team work, but Leerin didn't understand why he was so passionate about it.

She didn't know if the girl beside her understood him either, but her expression was hard to discern. She didn't seem to hate it. Rather, she was smiling as she watched him.

“.....Well, all that aside.”

Leerin's mood turned better.

“Okay, please stop there for now.”

She rapped the ground with her knuckle.

"Y, Yes"

Seemingly shocked by the sound, he..... Reverse jumped straight up, and not just him, Cauntia stood up too.

“It's lunch time, so let's eat together?”

“Ah.... Is it already that late?” Reverse looked back, not wanting to go.

“Yes, it's that late.”

Eldein was standing behind Leerin with a nervous look, carrying a large basket. No one knew when he got here. He didn't seem to know what to do before the two Heaven's Blade successors.

“Then let's find a place.....” she said and noticed Reverse was still looking at the ants.

“.....”

Cauntia saw where Leerin was looking, and watched her. Her eyes were a bit teary.

“Haa.....” Leerin turned her gaze to the sky. Today's sky was blue and fresh.

“Eldein, can you go to the canteen and buy a picnic blanket?”

“Ah, right.....” Eldein nodded.....

“Ah, I've got it~”

Synola appeared from behind Eldein, smiling and waving the picnic blanket.

“Eh? Ah..... Y, your maje~!” Eldein was speechless.

“Yes~ I'm the innocent girl Synola Alsheyra from the senior research institute.”

“You're still playing that role.”

“Of course. I'm still properly enrolled, you know?”

“Then suit yourself. Eldein, let's spread the blanket here and have lunch.”

“Ah, y, yes!”

Not knowing what to do, Eldein took the blanket from the person who insisted she was Synola Alsheyra and spread it on the grass. The five people sat down with the basket in the middle.

“Any rate. Are you still doing things like making your own lunch now?” Alsheyra asked as she ate. Leerin knew Alsheyra would come, and since the three Military Artists could eat a lot, she had packed such a large basket, but that was the limit.

“Yeah. I don't want to change my habit. Besides, I like to cook.”

“Well, it's fine since I like Lee-chan's cooking.”

“Then please don't complain.”

Leerin gave the lunch to Eldein who didn't dare touch it in front of the Queen and the two Heaven's Blade successors.

“.....? The stupid couple over there.”

“What now?”

“Oh, yes.”

Crouching alone, Reverse was staring at the ants as he nibbled at his sandwich. Cauntia was watching him with a smile. The two of them looked back at Alsheyra.

“Have you been guarding properly?”

“We are.”

“We're monitoring the movements of any Military Artists who are within 10 kilomels of Her Majesty.”

“Any movement?”

“Nope.”

“None at all.”

“The strange thing is?”

Towards Alsheyra's question, the pair looked as though they couldn't say it.

“Ah, because I already knew,” Leerin said as she filled their bowls.

“Well, since they've been exposed, there's no point keeping it secret.”

The pairs eyes met in response to Alsheyra's wry smile.

“You two stand out too much,” Leerin said, smiling.

“That's so weird, even though we've been using Sakkei. No one's looked this way since morning.”

“I've been staring though.”

“I, I didn't notice you.”

Eldein was disappointed.

“That's normal,” Cauntia said coldly. She was known for her cold attitude towards all boys except Reverse. Leerin knew of this recently. It was impossible for Eldein not to know, but it still hurt to hear it right from her.

“Um, so there are people with suspicious movements.”

“Meaning they are already spying on Her Majesty.”

“Hmm, I wonder if they plan to be forceful.”

What they would force, she did not say. Alsheyra read between the lines and understood time and place.

“On that note, does that even hold any meaning?” Cauntia said, shocked.

Alsheyra smiled wryly.

“Well, to your average citizen, as long as there's nothing suspicious, it doesn't matter who the king is.”

“It matters not to us either. If the king is of no use, isn't it enough to have him just sit in the seat?”

Cauntia's way of saying it was a bit extreme, but this was Grendan – a city that came across more filth monsters than others. And so Military Artists were valued more in here. Military Artists were recognized by their strength. Right now, the Queen Alsheyra Almonise was a Military Artist stronger than all the Heaven's Blade successors. But the next Queen wasn't the same. If that were the case, then the next Queen wouldn't have a say in the battle plans. A king without fighting strength couldn't go against the words of the Heaven's Blade successors.

But then there were precedents in the history of Grendan.

Conversely, even though the king had fighting strength, if he lacked the ability to govern, the ministers would end up holding the political power.

The King needed to possess the best ability in Grendan. If he didn't have it, he would only become a puppet. He would be in a cruel situation where everyone would try to control him.

“But then it may be charming for the one sitting on the throne.”

Alsheyra, the current holder of the throne, smiled painfully.

This all came about from the person Alsheyra named as her successor – Leerin.

Leerin was the child of Eutnohl. This was already acknowledged, and Alsheyra had used her authority to give the throne to Leerin, who was the successor to it.

The Ronsmier royal family was against this decision. In the battle last year, the Heaven's Blade successor, head of the Ronsmier family, Tigris, died. What made the matter worse was that the hope of the Ronsmier, Claribel, had left for the Academy City Zuellni. This was why the Ronsmier family was in a dispute about the decision of the inheritor to the throne. In the end, the Military Artists

following the royal families met in Rivanes' home, which was a family of distinguished Military Artists, and decided Terios, who had had great achievements, should be the successor.

The first to protest was the Ronsmier family.

The conclusion was simple. There was no need to give the throne to a successor who was not a Military Artist.

“But there is no rule that says the successor to the throne must be a Military Artist.”

“None of that really matters. Since it's a family problem, the people of that family should solve it among themselves.”

“You're quite right.”

“That aside, Terios, was it? Just what kind of guy is he?”

“Ah, I'm not sure. He seems to be the son of one of Old Tig's many children. That man had a lot children, yeah, he could probably be my uncle. Have you seen him before?” Alsheyra said.

“Um, yes I have.”

Not knowing whether the atmosphere was too tense so that no one noticed him, Eldein put his hand up.

“I once was out with him on Filth Monster suppression.”

“What's he like?”

“Quite carefree and he has strength. He also thinks about others, a man with a certain reputation.”

“He seems to meet your standards.”

“Yeah.”

“Tia, keep this discussion on track.”

“Yes.”

Reverse was still thinking about the ants. It seemed to Leerin that these two showed little interest in the topic. It was hard to believe. She could tell even

Cauntia just threw out the name Terios to get the conversation going.

“Rather saying the problem lies with Terios, it's more to do with the Rivanes family. They don't like to put aside tradition.”

Was that all?

Leerin disagreed with what Alsheyra said. Since Alsheyra was the Queen, she had ways to make Leerin the successor. She could do it with force. It should be simple for her. But of course, that would cause huge problems. That would hurt Grendan deeply. It was understandable when the Queen was worried, but there were other points Leerin didn't understand.

The older group that Alsheyra mentioned. As followers of the royal families, though they didn't directly interfere with the battles against the filth monsters and the political atmosphere of Grendan, they were quite active in the back. It was difficult to just push them aside. But was it that simple that they were against Alsheyra's choice because Leerin wasn't a Military Artist? Because this went against tradition?

Even the followers of the royal families comprehended the danger from the last battle. Was that why they needed a stronger successor?

But even so she was just worrying. She knew there was no other successor aside from her. This didn't come from confidence and arrogance. This was the truth.

Wasn't that why Alsheyra named her the successor to the throne?

Then why let it go?

The movement of assassinating Leerin?

“.....!”

Before she could say anything, Leerin stopped herself. She had forgotten what she wanted to say, but what she saw before her was worrying.

“What is it?”

Alsheyra, Reverse and Cauntia didn't notice it, not to mention Eldein. Was it her imagination? She felt the gaze watching her, yet all she saw were the school buildings and trees, and the blurry legs of Grendan from far away. What was

happening even further away from Grendan?

This was what her right eye, covered, felt.

Chapter 3: Haunts and Processions

Zuellni felt it.

It wasn't strange to feel it. This was the function of a Regios that avoided danger. Zuellni was the consciousness of the city, and it changed the city's route accordingly. The Mechanical Department worked to move the mechanical legs of the city that walked on with perfect balance. No one even noticed it happening.

This was right. To move successfully like the past. It would be hard to escape if the filth monsters already noticed the city, but that kind of a situation was rare. Still, even though the areas an Academy City went through tended to have fewer filth monsters, that wasn't always the case. The exception actually happened a few times last month. That was why the city had changed its route and continued its journey.

The number of encounters with filth monsters last year was too unusual.

Zuellni had been careless. Records of the number of filth monster encounters would be sent to other cities through the system of En. Though Zuellni was now the enemy of the world, her duty didn't change, and so the other cities continued to feed her information of filth monster sightings.

So everything worked as normal.

But.....

(You don't seem to be tense, Zuellni.)

The voice came like the crack of a whip. Zuellni shivered.

She remembered that atmosphere, that voice. She heard it when she still didn't have a city, when she played with the other young Electronic Fairies at Senou. She had heard of this voice.

She suddenly resisted. She couldn't be connected to the En like that.

But her resistance was useless. She couldn't cut the En.

The scenery before her changed. This was not the city anymore. This was wilderness – and in here was a city she had never seen before.

Thick and straight pillars pierced through the filth monster. They had become one. All Zuellni could feel was this filth monster.

(You're already the enemy of this world. To be like that and yet still maintain contact with En without alertness. Should I say that's bravery?) The voice seemed to mock her for lacking a sense of alertness.

“.....”

But Zuellni didn't reply.

(Silence? You can't have lost your voice? There must be something you want to say. Your feeling for the world has reached me. Then the world is your enemy.) The voice still mocked.

“.....”

But Zuellni kept silent. Her stubbornness was like the stubbornness of the youth.

(Very well. Then let me ask your body.)

End closed.

The ropes slipped off Zuellni. She regained her freedom. Though the period of invasion was short, the unpleasant aftertaste still ran through her body. She hugged herself and shivered.

She could hear the sound.

Of something pounding the earth intensely that differed from an Academy City – the sound of a city's legs.



Nina was called to the Student Council building after the first lesson.

“It’s a filth monster.”

Gorneo, the Head of the Military Arts, said. Sitting on the sofa, Nina accepted the words with her fists tightened.

“Meaning the trouble’s not yet over?”

Sitting next to her was Shin. The announcement had called both Nina and Shin over. Gorneo had enlarged a few photos for them. In the photos was the form of a filth monster, flying in the sky.

“It’s huge. Um, is it in its aged phase? Or what?”

“No.....Layfon and Claribel should be able to tell. But I don’t think it’s that.”

“A male in its 2nd or 3rd growth phase?”

“Ah, speaking of which, Gorneo, you’re also from Grendan,” Shin said with a smile. “And your fighting experience too?”

“.....”

At Gorneo’s painful expression, Shin laughed.

“About real experience, everyone else has it except the first years.”

“I want it to disappear.”

That cute voice coming from behind Gorneo belonged to the person knocking on the Student President’s desk with her knuckle.



The Student President Samiraya Mirke. Standing beside her was Leu. They had just been appointed to the posts in the recent election and they looked tense at this situation.

Leu nodded. Nina continued looking at the photos. The drones had taken the black and white photos.

“It doesn’t seem close. Are we discovered?”

“Don’t know. But from the information we get, that thing is moving in the same direction as us, and its speed is the same as ours.”

“Perhaps it’s chasing us,” Shin said, holding the photo.

“It’d be good to eliminate it before it comes near. If it’s a male in its 2nd phase, Layfon or Claribel should be able to take care of it.....but.”

“Hey, doesn’t this photo look strange?” Shin cut Gorneo off and flicked the photo.

Because Nina was also holding a photo.

The flying filth monster. Scales that were like rocks covered its body, and above it spread the long and huge wings. The tower was also in the photo, and it looked to be gigantic.

“There.....? Ah,” Nina noticed.

“Ah, yes. This guy has changed. It’s flying.”

“True.”

The wings weren’t moving according to the movement of the wind. But what about the position of the tail? Nina saw that the tail was drooping. If the filth monster was flying, the tail should be fluttering.

So the filth monster was gliding on the wind. It wasn’t flying. Was it making repeated movements of flying, gliding and landing just for the drones?

On closer inspection, they found even stranger things. An ominous feeling descended on the people gathered in the room.

“So I don’t think this is a simple filth monster attack.”

“You want to send two platoons over?”

“No. One platoon is to stay.”

“Uh?”

“If anything happens, it’s good to have two platoons. But if this is a male in its 2nd phase, then sending two platoons over is a waste.”

“Perhaps.”

“And in case anything happens, we need one platoon to stay at the city.”

“So the platoon that is out there doesn’t matter?”

“I think our own city won’t give up a platoon.”

“Ah, alright.”

Shin’s tone relaxed. But Nina understood the bitterness he felt. Either way, she had been under his care before she established the 17th platoon. Though he looked carefree, Shin was considerate towards his team members.

They must be worrying about the danger of heading to that place. Claribel did have outstanding fighting power, but not so for her team members. Besides, she just entered the Academy City. Nina already realized that she had yet to learn to coordinate with her team members.

Then.....

“Allow me.”

Nina put her hand up. If she didn’t do this, Shin would have put his hand up and the 17th platoon would become the spare platoon.

“Is that ok?”

“The 17th platoon has the most battle experience.”

“Then, I’m counting on you.”

“Roger.”

Gorneo understood quickly. He was originally in the 5th platoon but was now the captain of the 1st platoon. As the captain of the platoons, he had some contact with the 14th platoon, and so he understood Shin’s personality too.

“Uh, damn.”

Understanding their plan, Shin looked at the ceiling, discontent.

“Then that’s settled. Either way, there really is a gap in the level of battle experience,” Gorneo gave Shin’s shoulder a pat.

“Then I’ll call the members. Can we leave tonight?”

“Should be all right.”

Next, Nina and Gorneo started to discuss the procedures.

“.....I still can’t accept it,” Samiraya said. “This shouldn't be shouldered by one person alone.”

“Sami.....” Leu said.

“Isn’t this the city’s problem? Then the whole city should be responsible. It’s dangerous to just send one person out.”

“No. Not one person. One platoon,” Gorneo corrected with a bitter expression.

“Besides, that’s the conclusion we came up with. Didn’t you agree with us?”

“I thought there was no other way, but still, this isn’t right. Doesn’t that mean someone would be sacrificed?”

“Scared of seeing the face of the one being sacrificed? That’s a bad reason.”

“But.....”

“Listen up. Military Artists are ready to take risks. It is our responsibility to stand up when danger comes. This is the rule of this world. As Military Artists, we won’t not step out and fight. If we came to the Academy City thinking like that, we would not have entered Military Arts. Not to mention fighting.”

“Yes. There is a risk, but we don’t give up our identity as Military Artists because of that risk. If we came to the Academy City like that, we didn’t have to enter the Military Arts subject.”

“Still, there should be a better way to fight.”

“What kind of a fight? A fight without anyone dying? Or a fight without any damage to the city? I’ll choose the latter. If the city sustains fatal damage, then the level of danger is entirely different. Stop it, Student President. We can’t

guarantee a Military Artist will not be hurt even in a normal fight. If there are the injured, then there will be the dead.”

“Hey, hey, Head of Military Arts, stop bullying the Student President,” Shin said, preventing Samiraya from speaking.

“And if this really is a male in its 2nd phase, then there won’t be any injured and dead, right?”

“Yes, Student President. So please say you agree with us,” Shin urged. Nina nodded with confidence.

Nina wasn’t just making up her confidence as everyone was positively creating the future.

Not just Layfon. Even Nina had grown enough to handle a male in its 2nd phase. Sharnid and Dalshena had also increased their level of strength, getting used to fights against filth monsters. Besides, there was Felli checking out the surroundings, so they didn’t have to worry about traps.

“.....I understand. I’m sorry for saying unnecessary things.”

“It’s all right.”

Nina exchanged a glance with Leu. After comforting the Student President with their gaze, Nina and Shin left the room.

“The current Student President is quite good,” Nina said to him.

“Well, because the previous one wasn’t all that great.”

Nina didn’t know how to respond. Her expression turned stiff.

“The Student President now is still thinking like a student. The previous Student President, Karian, was more experienced.”

She couldn’t retort. Layfon was a good example. Karian had caught hold of the information and forced Layfon to change subjects, making him take the path of a Military Artist once more.

What would Nina have done instead?

What would she have done if she were in Karian’s position? She would probably have contacted Layfon directly, and then been rejected by him. How

could she be thinking about this? But she knew she would have gone to persuade Layfon. Whether it was successful or not, she would have done her best to convince him.

Heading straight ahead was her personality.

But then, would even a normal person do that? He might give up once he knew of Layfon's past.

But Karian didn't.

He had chosen a way to avoid failure. It didn't matter if he was despised and hated. When the time called for it, he would use any means to achieve his end.

Karian was too experienced. Shin's conclusion was correct. But even for Karian, he might feel a sense of guilt for making Layfon change course.

(Is that possible?) She didn't know. He was too experienced.

"But she'll be a good Student President."

"Ah, I think so too."

Samiraya had come to find Nina during the presidential race. Nina felt at that time that she was passionate.

The decisions of the Student Council all involved papers. Nina knew from the first moment she got involved. But in the meeting just then, it was the first time they held a discussion first before making a decision. Even though the paperwork was done, in reality people may bleed, people may die. This feeling was her first.

Nina threw away her cowardice, her indecision and hesitation. Everyone would fail, and everyone would grow. She had failed so many times that she didn't want to lift her head, but without those failures she wouldn't be who she was now.

And right now, she still failed in something.

"This should be not shouldered by one person."

"Not a person. A platoon."

Why were Samiraya and Gorneo's words hammering her? Nina couldn't make

peace for a long time.



Nina called the 17th platoon and explained the situation.

“Again and again we’re going. I really hate missions outside the city.”

Sharnid was complaining as usual as he prepared the gear for outside use.

Layfon was checking the Sapphire Dite that Harley gave him.

“No matter how hard we tried, it’s impossible to do so in so short a time.”

“I know.”

“But we’ve made some adjustments for the Adamantium Dite. The capacity for Kei should be better than before. Nothing is changed regarding its use. It’s better to test it before using it.”

“If there is time,” Felli said.

She had restored her Light Dite. A number of flakes were circling her. Some flakes had already headed off for the filth monster.

“We don’t have to worry if it is a male?”

“If it’s what they said it is.”

Dalshena and Sharnid said.

They wore a fighting suit outside the suit that was to block off the pollutants. Everyone wore a helmet and waited for the vehicles to be prepared.

During this time, Nina explained what the drones didn’t get to convey.

“What if it’s a trap? Who would be doing it? The filth monster?”

“Who knows. I told you not to be so off guard.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll guard your back, Shena.”

“Not the back. I’ll grab your throat and use you as a shield.”

“That’s love.”

“Where can you see love from that!”

An angry Dalshena and a laughing Sharnid. Harley laughed too. Felli sighed and Layfon looked worried. To be able to alleviate the tension before the mission showed this platoon was really relaxed.

What was said in the Student Council Building weren't lies. Many things happened last year, and the 17th platoon was in the middle of it.

Everyone must have accumulated some experience.

But if they were really strong enough, then they wouldn't be so troubled that they couldn't say what they were truly feeling. Nina struggled internally for not being able to tell them about Vati.

Recalling Samiraya's words, Nina really wanted to ask for help from more people, if possible.

But Vati would not let that happen.

(Right.....Is that possible?)

Would it be all right if they were outside the city? Could she shake free of Vati's monitor?

Perhaps.....But this would be a dangerous gamble.

The vehicles were ready with the help of the mechanics.

“Ok. Let's go,” Nina said, and the platoon moved.

They swayed with the movements of the bikes.

(Is this the only chance?)

Her heart swayed along with the bike's movements. She couldn't return to her normal self. If this continued, she wouldn't be able to do anything.

“Get yourself together,” Nina scolded herself softly.

The sun had already sunk down in the west when Felli spoke.

“What is it?”

“The flakes have arrived, but it's strange.”

“What's going on?”

Felli was on Layfon's bike, and Nina, Sharnid and Dalshena on another bike.

"How is it strange?"

The flakes showed other pictures on the inside of the helmet.

What was shown wasn't a filth monster. It was something larger, and it looked familiar.

"What's this?" Dalshena said. Nina felt the same.

In the picture was a city. Gigantic legs were pounding the ground. They moved slowly, but they belonged to a Regios. Because it was huge, each of its strides was long.

"The filth monster is here too....."

Then the picture zoomed out. There was a filth monster, pierced by a tall pillar. Perhaps it was dead. It shook with the city's movements.

"Is it dead?"

"The drones only showed the filth monster, right?"

"Ah, yes," Layfon said. Nina nodded.

"Then why is this picture so strange? Or has someone changed the data of the drones...? The city?"

"But why do that? It doesn't make sense to do that and make Zuellni's Military Artists eliminate the filth monster."

"Even if you tell me this....."

"It won't work."

"You're cold."

Ignoring Sharnid and Dalshena's conversation, Nina concentrated on the pictures.

Because a flake would observe a city at about the same as a human's height, the picture had been taken with a low angle shot, as if the city was about to fall on it.

"Felli, are there any pictures taken from above?"

“Please wait.”

The picture changed.

“Uh?”

“Hey hey. What is that?”

Everyone was speechless.

There was nothing in the city. Not even a speck of dust. What was left was the exposed side of the mechanisms of the city.

“It seems no one lives there.”

“No. Regardless of how you look at it, there’s no one there.”

“What happened to this city?”

Nina looked at the city, her mind full of suspicions. This wasn’t normal. But why was it appearing here? Why was it chasing Zuellni?

Uh. Regios. Electronic Fairy.

Schneibel.

The enemy of the world.

Those words floated in her mind.

“I don’t like it,” Felli said. “What should we do, captain? Since the filth monster isn’t the target, the next possibility is what the Head of Military Arts has deduced – a trap, or something else altogether. I think it’s fine to return to Zuellni.”

“Yes.....But, this city may have a plan. That’s why it’s getting near Zuellni.”

“But for what purpose?”

“I don’t know.....uh, perhaps the Electronic Fairies are in love?”

“Your imagination can really work anywhere.”

“Don’t praise me.”

“I’m not praising you. Your ear and brain are both useless.”

Nina ignored them and fell into deep thoughts.

Could this be a chance?

If Schneibel had sent this over, then perhaps Nina could tell Layfon about the situation while they fought. But what about after that? She couldn't think of an effective way. She couldn't see a hope. The city that should prepare for the next fight was Grendan, not Zuellni. The Military Artists in Zuellni had no chance of winning against Vati. Even if she let Layfon know, the difference in strength was too much.

She could only put aside the danger right before her.

This was worrying.

This worry, this impatience, this frustration.....Could she only think of synonyms? That was so pessimistic.

"Captain?"

"Ah, sorry. Will you contact the Head of Military Arts?"

"Yes."

"There is time to report and obtain new instructions. I'll leave it to you."

"I understand."

This situation was strange. Even Layfon noticed it. It was different from the investigation of the Haikizoku. It even felt like a trap.

Did Nina know something about the current situation? Or was this related to something?

Felli looked blurrily at Nina, who had successfully contacted Gorneo. She was speaking softly in the helmet.

"She really makes me unhappy."

"Yes."

Layfon's voice became small.

Were they to proceed or return? Nina's decision made time flow slowly. There was a need to contact Gorneo, but it took too long.

“But this is unusual.”

No one lived in the city, and it appeared filth monsters had attacked it..... but it didn't seem to be the case. The city was chasing after Zuellni. It really was unusual. This was even Layfon's first time encountering something so strange. And it was the same for others. Even Nina was in doubt, and that was why it took her some time to make a decision.

“That's the case, so it took more time to decide.”

Layfon couldn't retort against Felli's conclusion. He felt it took too long.

“We'll investigate.”

The 17th platoon moved because of Nina's announcement.

“It isn't a filth monster, but we don't know what the other city has in mind. We'll go in and investigate.”

“Well, I felt that it would be like this,” Sharnid said, giving up.

“But we're ready for something rowdy. Hasn't this been a happy school year?”

“There isn't a Military Arts Competition.”

The bikes ran again. Felli calculated they would arrive at dawn.

Sharnid and Dalshena spoke. The two of them had fought because of Dinn.

“The movement of a city shouldn't be wrong. But, there's no reason to follow an Academy City, right?”

“Why don't we go quietly ask our opponent. For the past year, we've tried hard.”

“Alright, then we'll go and pursue it.”

“To where?”

“Aren't we heading for it now?”

“True. It's correct to directly pursue the source of the commotion. Then let them see our passion. If you know better, you should leave.”

“I don't want to spread that kind of lie. If that's the case, Sharnid, why don't

you put your foot in the front tire and see what happens?”

“Hey, I don’t have to try it.”

“A knock to your head may erase your imagination.”

Their relationship hadn’t suffered because of what had happened that day. Layfon had always found it unbelievable, and so he had been envious of them. Could he hold the same feeling for Leerin who had abandoned him? Or what about Nina, if she was really hiding something?

The relationship of the two seemed to show each other how small-minded they were. He couldn’t calm down.

The bikes continued moving.

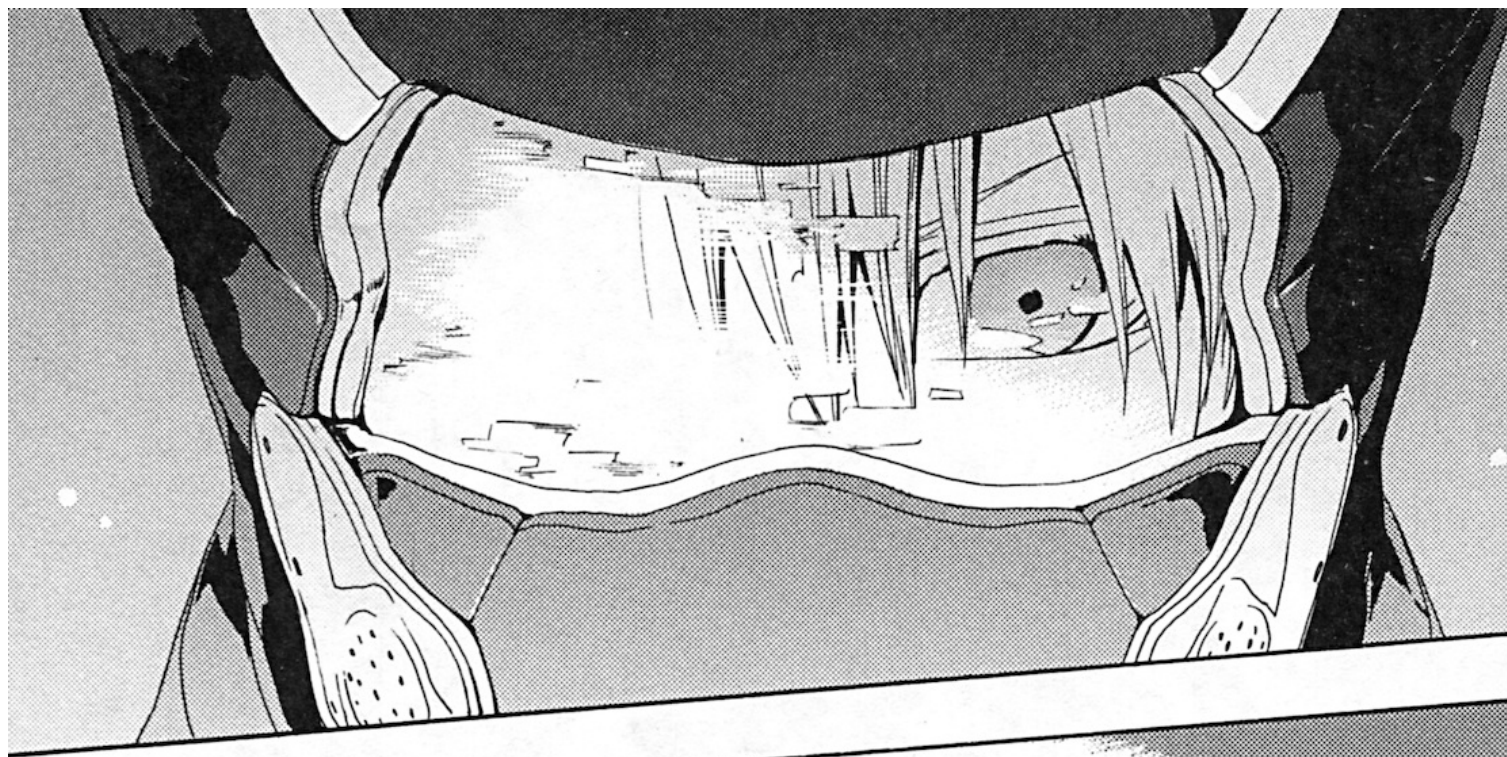
Felli was resting. The inside of Layfon’s helmet became quiet. Besides contacting Zuellni and the drones, Felli had cut off the other functions of her flakes, including visual support. The vision field before the bike had narrowed.

Layfon watched Nina who was in front of him.

What should he do if she headed straight for a battle alone, a battle she didn’t even understand? What should he do? Should he ask? But even if he did, she might not answer.

“.....Is this related to the captain?”

Had his reflexes slowed? He felt he could see her expression clearer without the helmet.



Layfon was surprised by Felli's voice. He thought she was sleeping. He shook his head.

"She won't tell us."

"She won't."

But he wanted to know. What was happening in this world? Who were Leerin and Nina fighting? Could he really do nothing? Felli didn't say more. Perhaps she had gone to sleep for real this time.

The regular sound produced by the engine of the bike drowned out Felli's voice.

A person alone in a quiet space would think about many things. To stop thinking about the failure that would have him curl into a ball, Layfon held the handles of the bike tightly.

What a blessing it would be if he could just naively keep going straight.



Felli's calculation was correct. The city appeared when the sun rose.

"Ah, are we to head straight in? Isn't it enough for Felli to investigate?"

"Yes. This distance is enough for my flakes to gather data, so I want to investigate thoroughly."

"I see."

"It's all right to enter, but we have to leave the bikes here."

"It's creepy to be stranded without the bikes."

"Shall we split into two groups....."

"Better not to divide our fighting power here."

"Ok."

"Then Felli will collect data at this distance. We'll head back when it's all done."

After the brief meeting, they moved according to Nina's decisions. The legs of the city pounded the ground, making the bikes sway.

A change happened as they were about to run.

"Ah! Captain!"

Layfon noticed it. Nina did too when he finished speaking. It was aiming at her. She instantly decided to abandon the bike and leap up from it.

Layfon reflexively stopped his bike and let it roll on the ground, opposite the direction of the city to protect Felli.

It exploded.

It was Nina's bike. The bike was damaged from the attacks coming down from above, and the fuel tank burst. The pillar of fire rose.

"Damn. Is this a trap?" Sharnid called.

"Captain! Are you all right?"

"The clothes are damaged," Nina said. She quickly took out the fixing gel and sprayed the hole with it.

And the second attack came, but this time it wasn't a sneak attack. Layfon had time to react. He released his Kei and restored the Shim Adamantium Dite to block it.

"Hey, if this continues it'll be a mess. Let's hurry and escape," Sharnid said under the sky twisted by the explosion.

"You guys go."

Nina had restored her Dite too and was fighting, but the attacks were becoming fiercer. Both of them were unable to defeat their enemy.

"Hey!"

"This will continue if no one becomes the bait."

"Ha, at this time....."

"Sharnid-senpai and Felli-senpai....."

"Uh?"

“I’ll stay. There must be a way if two people are to lure it out.”

“Layfon.”

“Felli-senpai, please stay at the rear.”

“.....I understand.”

Felli was sitting in the bike. It would be dangerous to keep fighting while protecting her.

“Ah!”

Sharnid shouted and drove the bike close to Layfon.

“Don’t die.”

“I know.”

After confirming Felli had moved to Sharnid’s bike, Layfon controlled his bike with one hand and turned to Nina. She had no time to say anything. She stood on Layfon’s bike and continued to fight.

The bike kept running.

Towards the city devoid of people, a mysterious city with something hidden in it.

Chapter 4: Hermits and Agitators

They were eyeing each other quietly.

The circular fighting grounds were covered with walls. It felt closed in here, and there was no audience stand. Instead, a few cameras were streaming the fights live. A few people were watching the situation through the recording.

There were only two Military Artists in the grounds. One was a Military Artist in his prime, wearing a beard. He held a huge sword, its tip stabbing the ground.

Opposite him was a younger Military Artist. On his waist was a katana that looked much more fragile than the huge sword. He was also ready.

How long had they held this pose?

Only the people watching the live-stream noticed the passing of time.

To this city, the strength of Military Artists was only needed to defend it. The residents didn't have to watch the fights.

(Can the city maintain its operations like this?) Karian couldn't help but think.

It would be a great way for the city's residents to relieve their boredom by watching the beautiful matches between Military Artists. In fact, many cities were doing this. Karian heard of this from other people in the Academy City.

But this city was different. It limited the number of people watching the fights, and few came to watch it. There also weren't any posters or pictures showing off the Military Artists themselves.

"What do you think?" he said to the female beside him.

There were a few seats in this special viewing room. There were a few males and females watching the match other than Karian. He could tell they were quietly and intently watching the match, and that they were a bit tense too.

Since the female beside him was tense and that there didn't seem to be an

opening for a conversation, he turned naturally to the other female on the other side of him.

“I understand,” the female said curtly.

“Is that so? That’d be good if that’s the case.”

“But what’s the meaning of it?”

“The other side offered such a condition. I can’t not accept.”

“Is that so? Why not just hand over the data?”

“It can be fake if you just read the data and not look at the real thing.”

“If it’s just the degree of eyesight.....”

The female cut off the conversation. Karian noticed it a bit later too.

There was movement. No. It was about to begin. Karian felt the change in the atmosphere. Since he was able to detect the change despite being a non-Military Artist, Military Artists themselves should have an even deeper understanding of the situation.

The people in the live-stream moved.

They jumped at high speed. The cameras swayed at the ripples made by their movements. Instantly, dust was thrown everywhere, and the scene plunged into silence.

“Has it begun?” the female said icily.

The picture came back to the screen.

Murmurs filled the room.

In it was a man kneeling on the ground with his sword broken into two, while the younger man had his katana against the man’s neck.



The young man looked at the camera.

“Well, just this kind of level.”

Karian read this from the movements of his lips.

It hadn't been a day before Karian appeared in front of the roaming bus. The special color of the roaming bus seemed to be displaying it as private property to any bystanders, and Karian entered the bus as if he was an official of the city.

“Finally, we have three,” the woman sitting in one of the seats said to him. A woman with long hair and a firm attitude.

“Stania, please return to Saintberg if you're dissatisfied.”

“That can't be! Young master!”

“Besides, they've bodyguards. You're hired by dad's mercenary gang, so you belong over there. Shouldn't you head back for another mission?”

“No. I'm coming.”

“Well, anyway, has anyone got a question on our destination?”

Stania was indecisive when Karian asked the important question.

“I'm sorry.”

Stania lowered her head shyly.

“Well, don't be so cold. From the beginning she's been hanging 'young master, young master' from the side of her mouth because she can't calm down.”

“Haia?!”

“Wait up. I'm just telling the truth,” Haia smiled at the angry and red-faced Stania. Behind him, Myunfa was sniffing.

“No, I'm sorry. I must have been too harsh.”

“Young master.....”

“A response won't be called for without that action. You do have your logic.”

“No, Young master, you don't have to apologize for me. It's all because of me.

I didn't understand your thinking, Young master.....”

“Uh, I get it. Anyway, just calm down first.”

“Excuse me.”

Stania was leaning close to the back of Karian's chair, as if she was about to attack him. Realizing that, she left, her face red. Looking at her, a sense of nostalgia welled up in Karian.

Her father. The mercenary gang Stania belonged to. That happened before Felli was born. It seemed that family hadn't been dealing in information trade between cities before Karian's birth, but they had left their own city because of an important case, and had taken Stania with them.

Speaking of which, this family couldn't live in any city, no matter what the reason was. Stania felt like an older sister to Karian in terms of age.

“Speaking of which, Haia, that Military Artist, is he good?”

“Well..... Average.”

“You're lying. You just barely won.”

“That's not the case at all.”

“Well, Stania has been doing her best.”

“Yes, Myunfa. Haia has tried his best to win the fight.”

“Myunfa. Stop saying redundant things.”

“Right. I'm sorry.”

After the driver received the order to leave, the roaming bus was lowered. When its wheels touched the ground, the bus began to head for another city.

“In this city exists people who make Haia acknowledge their strength. There should be other 'slumbering' Military Artists in other cities too. Then it's not useless to show them these images.”

Right, that scene would one day again befall his own world. Karian understood. The being able to do that kind of thing had already come to the Academy City, come to the city Zuellni that Karian had left.

When that time came, could these people continue living on without knowing anything? Was it alright that this inevitable fate be given only to the group who were labeled resisters?

"When we see cracks in this fate, what will we do?"

So, he had taken action. Even one extra person would be good, one extra strength would be good, if it would let them see the world's crisis.....

"Or, they will be unable to move because of despair."

The copied data was of the danger.

The thing that had covered Grendan.

Right now, Karian traveled, while delivering the records and images of his time in Zuellni to the cities. They were records of the world's crisis in front of their eyes.

The copied records were really too shocking, and even Haia had a moment where he could not understand what exactly he had seen.

If other people were too cowardly, and wouldn't be able to move, then Karian who was spreading these copied records would become the prophetic fate of mankind's defeat, the instigator who spread despair through the world.

"I hope things won't become like that."

For mankind.

Also for himself.

The roaming bus advanced. For the purpose of delivering terrifying records to another city, it advanced.

"Well, this is also for overcoming fate."

In the din of the bus setting forth, Karian closed his eyes.



A motorcycle was quickly moving through the wilderness.

"Our opponents won't give us any time for a breather at all!"

"I know!"

Layfon operated the motorcycle with one hand, and Nina stood up from the vehicle brandishing two iron whips, dealing with the uncountable rain of Kei spilling from the city devoid of people.

The enemies had not appeared till now. The external Kei did not take a straight path. Their enemies were in a hidden area, firing external Kei towards Layfon and the others in a curved path.

Layfon knew that the opponents' offense were focused here, and had not flown to Felli and the others' retreat group.

"When we reach a position to jump out we'll get off. Our escape method is not going to be waiting their for help, but we're going to wait for this city to catch Zuellni, are there any problems?"

"Alright!"

Layfon nodded to respond to Nina's query.

The motorcycle drove at full speed to the city without people.

Because of the great size of the city, even if it looked very close, it was actually quite a far distance away.

(They can accurately snipe their target even from this far away?)

Without great strength, this kind of thing definitely couldn't be done.

There was a Military Artist of great strength in this city that seemed not to be meant for human habitation. From his judgments, all of the attacks that had hit toward this area were from a single person.

This city existed to transport a single person.

Facing this situation for the first time, Layfon managed to conceal the confusion on his face. Other than continuously striking with his arms to deal with the violent external Kei, he could not resist thinking about the possibilities of the opponent who hid over there.

Did this have something to do with Nina?

Would he take advantage of the current situation to ask her?

If something were currently being carried out, Layfon wanted to know the answer. The current him strongly felt this way. He didn't want to always be kept in the dark. He didn't even have any way to decide. He didn't have the courage to leap out in a situation that he knew nothing of, and so Layfon wanted to know the truth.

At the finish of this long defensive battle that seemed endless, the motorcycle that Layfon and Nina were riding reached the legs of the empty city.

"Let's go!"

"Alright!"

Coordinating with Nina's shout, Layfon leaped high. In order to grab the luggage that was placed in the vehicle, Layfon's leaping motion was slow by half a second, but the speed of his leap instantly caught up to Nina. The external Kei passed by the two, smashing the motorcycle into pieces. The two escaped the clutches of the jumping flames, and their feet fell in the outskirts of the empty city.

"!"

Originally Layfon had thought the attacks would hit like a storm.

However, in reality the external Kei offensive had stopped. In front of Layfon and Nina was just a flat, boundless space with machinery. This place didn't even have soil. This city didn't have any of the buildings that were the foundations of human life, and only had a great flat plain.

"Where.....?"

Layfon heard Nina's voice as he examined the surroundings. However, regardless of how he used internal Kei to strengthen his senses, he couldn't find the figure of an enemy.

"Has he hid himself with Sakkei?"

"Felli, can you use Psychokinesis to find the opponent?"

(.....Platoon.....Fon.....)

"Felli?"

(Mixed.....Hindering.....Don't.....)

"Felli, what's wrong?"

"Felli-senpai?"

The two called out simultaneously. But, the flakes connected to their helmets could only transmit short snippets of Felli's voice. Her voice was being interfered with, and they couldn't understand what she was saying. Soon after, even this garbled voice gradually weakened, and disappeared.

"Is her Psychokinesis being interfered with?"

"At this distance, Felli-senpai's Psychokinesis wouldn't cut off, unless they were attacked."

"You think that's the case?"

"No, at least the opponent hasn't sent any attacks from this city. But....."

"If there was an ambush hiding nearby..... right? Damn! But even if we know, we're already trapped here."

"Ah....."

Layfon understood the meaning in Nina's words, and concentrated harder on observing the surroundings.

Catching their breath, their eyes intersected.

"Someone's moving."

"Are they luring us in?"

".....Perhaps."

"Who is it?"

Thinking that perhaps Nina knew the answer, Layfon put forth the question.

"I don't know."

However, Nina shook her head.

Her voice really didn't sound like she was lying.

Or, did he himself want to believe that she wasn't lying?

"Anyway, right now we can only do things within the scope of our abilities. Layfon, let's split up to search this city."

"Okay..... wait, captain. In this kind of place splitting up is dangerous, I think that it's better for us to move together."

"Is that so? That's true, let's go then."

"Okay."

Nina took strides and walked to the front, and Layfon followed carrying the luggage on his back.

Should he ask, or shouldn't he?

The two moved along the outskirts, first expanding their search from the outer city. In the circular city surface, no matter where they walked they could only see the machinery on the separated lower level, and even without strengthening their sight they could see the the other side of the outskirts.

In this kind of situation, where would their opponent hide?

"Underground."

"That's the only possibility."

In this situation one couldn't even object to it. Above the ground was empty, and if the other party weren't flying in the sky, then he could only be hiding underground.

However, if they wanted to find the entrance leading underground, they had to look from a high place or they wouldn't find it. In this situation, their opponent wouldn't have left an obvious entrance. Franky speaking, if they only used their eyes to search from above, it was like using a single board to cover a cave, and concealment would already be adequate.

Since they couldn't rely on Felli's Psychokinesis, they could only walk around finding the entrance to a passageway.

"Next up will be a protracted siege, waiting for the opponent to move."

"That's okay, I guess....."

Layfon's low mumble made Nina show a perplexed expression, and Layfon expressed his doubts to her:

"Captain?"

"Hm?"

"Have you been injured?"

"Ah.....Ahah. A little, because my isolation suit was damaged."

"Let's treat it now."

"No, with this kind of small wound, internal Kei should be able to treat it....."

"It's best to truly treat it now while we have time to treat it."

"Wu, is that so? I guess."

Layfon immediately took a medical kit out of the luggage on his back. The putty had a positive effect in treating pollutants, but should have no way to completely eradicate the pollutants that had already entered the body.

"But, to take off my battle suit here is a bit....."

"It's not a problem, if there's a situation I will respond immediately."

Layfon pulled out the Sapphire Dite, restoring the steel threads. Layfon immediately spread out numerous steel threads to their limits in their surroundings, woven into a defensive formation.

"No, that's not what I meant."

"? Then what did you mean?"

"Uh, I was talking about the inside of the battle suit. Even if I have some pants and a T-shirt, um....."

"?"

Layfon didn't really understand, but Nina had already become flustered with her face red.

"It's like that, you should understand, right?"

"Understand what?"

"The isolation suit is very thin, and it seems to have broken because of the attacks just now....."

"That's why I'll use this period of time to fix Captain's isolation suit. I've attended a workshop, so I can do it if it's a simple repair."

"Wu, is that so. That's not bad, but, so, you know."

".....Captain, what exactly did you start saying just now?"

"I meant to say that even if there aren't people here, I still can't bare my skin out in the open!"

Nina shouted this, with her face red to the extent where it could get no redder. Layfon finally understood.

After understanding this situation, Layfon's face also reddened.

"H-hold on, there should be a tent in here."

"Really....."

Layfon found the tent from the luggage in a panic. He unfolded the fist-sized tent to unpack it, throwing it out. After some wild bouncing it became a tent for single-person use.

After entering, Nina took off her battle suit. At the same time as the fighting suit and isolation suit underneath were taken off, Layfon put the medical kit in the tent.

This guy was still clueless as always.

After removing the battle suit over and isolation suit, the heat from her tired body dissipated outwards. In order to keep from impeding her body's movements, Nina had taken off everything leaving only a thin, elastic T-shirt and tight pants. She confirmed her entire body, with the areas with persistent pain being her right thigh and her back.

Nina looked at her right thigh, only seeing some black pollutant-like things, spraying the area of the small wound. The pollutants had entered her body from the wound, burning the skin. The pollutants didn't look like they were expanding, indicating that the first aid just now had really stopped the pollutants' invasion.

The pain was still there. The quality of her focus in an urgent situation and when she was being alert were completely different. Before arriving in the city, Nina had completely forgotten the pain of her wound, but after entering the city had gradually noticed the pain.

At that time, Layfon rapidly looked over Nina's wound. She feared that maybe noticing the pain would change her body's movements.

"Undoubtedly that kind of thing will happen for a short while."

She only then realized that that person was very slow, but also had a keen side.

But, his keen side was completely focused on combat.

He was a Military Artist more excellent than Nina. With things as they were, she didn't even need to say that kind of thing. Nina had received the help of the Haikizoku, and in her hands were Dites that could withstand strong Kei power. Even so, she still did not think she could beat Layfon. Perhaps she could top Layfon in an instant of destructive power.

Though, only this and nothing more.

Utilizing great amounts of Kei, experience, techniques, movements, tactics, Layfon was a hundred steps in front of Nina in everything.

Nina wanted Layfon's help. Though if he hadn't joined, then she could instantly obtain victory on that battlefield. However, to become strong, Nina needed Layfon's help, even Felli and Sharnid, and Dalshena as well. If she could say it, Nina wanted to let more people know the truth, and afterwards ask them to help her.

But, in the Academy City Zuellni she couldn't do this. Vati's monitoring was there, and if she wished, the nightmarish scene that happened in Grendan would reappear in the Academy City. At that time, the people in the Academy City wouldn't even have the power to resist.

But, what if it were here, what about in this place that was far from the Academy City?

It should be alright to tell Layfon the truth here, right?

If she wanted to tell Layfon everything, and ask him to help her, couldn't she only take advantage of right now? Even if she spoke the facts, even if she begged for help, perhaps she would still be powerless. The might of the enemies was far too great, even already making Nina and others feel deep despair before fighting. Even so, shouldn't she let him know about this, since it would be good to have even an extra person?

"Right now....."

Perhaps it was the only opportunity.

"I've finished repairing your isolation suit, how is Captain doing?"

The voice came from outside the tent. Nina who was immersed in thoughts suddenly returned to reality, beginning to realize the pain of the wound. Her thigh had already been treated. Nina had looked at it, and probably other than one spot, her body didn't have any other wounds. She just need to apply some cream on it, then take some capsules of resisting agents, and it should be fine.

But, that place was.....

"Sorry, Layfon. If I don't ask for your help, I can't reach that place myself."

"Huh, where is it?"

"My back."

Even if she used a mirror, Nina still would have difficulty seeing the wound. But, she indeed felt pain from there. If she extended her hand she could touch that place, but Nina couldn't apply the medicine well to herself. That place didn't hurt like her thigh, so it was probably only a small wound. Even so, she couldn't just ignore this wound.

"Ah, okay. I understand."

Just as Layfon was about to stick his head into the tent entrance, Nina suddenly thought of something. The tight pants and T-shirt on her body had big splits at their seams, and Nina frantically turned her back to the entrance, shrinking her body.



"Uh, it's fine if I just spread it here?"

This tent was very small, and Layfon also took caution of the situation outside. He quickly confirmed the location of the wound, and extended a hand into the tent. Nina pushed the container filled with cream forward with a finger. Layfon scooped a big lump of cream with his fingers, and pressed his fingers against Nina's back. The cold feeling of the cream made Nina shiver involuntarily.

"Does it hurt?"

"No, no, I'm okay."

The moment his fingers touched her back, Nina's whole body felt a tense feeling that she didn't quite understand herself. She didn't know whether it was Layfon's problem, since it could be because of the pain of the wound. This was definitely because the wound was positioned on her back, so she couldn't see the the moment that the cream came in contact with the wound, so her reaction was stronger than usual.

It was definitely this, for sure.

But, because of this, why did the touch of the fingers applying cream make Nina so tense? She didn't really understand the reason. Was it because Layfon was a male? How could that be? When Nina received treatment in the hospital, she never paid any attention to the gender of her doctor.

In this situation, where a male was touching her bare skin with his hand, wasn't it the same as seeing the doctor?

She really didn't understand.

She just moved her lips, not uttering any sound. Even if Layfon heard it and asked, she wouldn't know how to respond.

The hand was quickly removed.

"Thanks."

At the regret she felt that those fingers were no longer touching her back, Nina became even more confused. Nina cut off the many emotions moving inside her heart with that word.

"Then, let's move quickly. I feel like the atmosphere has become unsuitable."

Layfon's reply once again strongly pulled Nina back to reality.

"Let's go then."

Even though her reply was short, her tone was quite sharp. Nina extended her arm for the repaired battle suit and isolation suit.



The change in the atmosphere made Layfon hurriedly throw the battle suit repair kit into the luggage, and he extended his hand to touch the Shim Adamantium Dite.

While Layfon was repairing the battle suit, the steel threads had been spread out. If an enemy's body so much as touched a steel thread anywhere, Layfon would have felt the vibration of Kei emanating from that place. The steel threads had not changed.

However, the current atmosphere had changed.

Perhaps the person hiding in the shadows was currently taking action.

Layfon took notice of the tent behind him as he slowly got up. Just from seeing the long-distance shooting from before, he was able to understand that the enemy was quite a skillful Military Artist. The array of steel threads might have been bypassed by the opponent. Layfon was not careless, and cautiously confirmed his surroundings.

"Too naive."

The voice that came from his back made Layfon's expression go rigid. At the same time as his eyes widened, his body moved along with them. Layfon turned to his back, extracting the Shim Adamantium Dite, restoring it, and slashing the blade at the form flitting above the tent.

The blade was blocked by a pillar.

No, the thing that blocked it was a rough, club-like object.

In that area was a man with a huge body, a domineering warrior exuding

burning anger.

No, that wasn't right. He only looked like this. It was a false image created by the strong Kei being radiated by the opponent. The fear in his heart was minimal, and Layfon's eyes captured the truth.

Actually, there was a man standing in the space between Layfon and the tent. He was a man with a slender body.

The opponent was an old man. His hair was combed to the rear, and his beard was trimmed very precisely. On his body he wore plain leaf-colored clothing that didn't match the machinery.

The weapons in his hands were iron whips, slightly thinner than Nina's iron whips.

He relaxedly blocked Layfon's blade.

"This place is this old man's battleground. This old man can exist everywhere, but also doesn't exist anywhere."

The old man said this.

"Youngster, let me rest."

When he heard these words, Layfon had already charged forward. Nina was in the tent behind the old man, and Layfon's mind didn't have any ideas of retreat. He drew the Shim Adamantium Dite, at the same time releasing the steel threads to stab. Countless steel threads took the form of a thrusting rain, which should have run through the old man's body.

However, Layfon didn't get the feeling of hitting his opponent.

"!"

The steel threads all missed the old man, missed the old man and continued rushing past the tent behind him, most of them sticking into machinery and producing explosions.

Layfon hadn't expected this, the old man's Kei flow had pushed away the steel threads' thrusts.

This was the only possibility.

"What a skillful youngster. But, you're not bold enough when you attack."

When the sound reached his ears, the old man had already moved. The blade that Layfon had struck out with again cut upwards. However, his body had not put any power into the blow. Layfon spread the steel threads out for an all-encompassing attack, but it was already too late.

The old man who once again received his blade was in front of him.

In his left hand was another iron whip that he was free to hit with.

He struck out.

"Hm!"

It was too late to use his sword to defend. Layfon changed the path of the steel threads, making them form a wall between him and the iron whip.

"How skillful-"

His roar dominated the world. A Kei sound technique - Sound of War attacked his entire body. The old man's momentum pushed back Layfon's battle instincts. The wall of steel threads was shattered, and the iron whip dropped on Layfon's shoulder.

Half of his body lost feeling. In the next moment, Layfon's vision began to turn, rising, and then falling.

Long before understanding his situation, Layfon's consciousness had already been blown away by the attack.

"Layfon!"

Something had happened. But, when Nina saw it was already too late. She was putting on her battle suit, and when she heard the sound and rushed out, everything had already ended. With a nearby sound like a string of explosions, Layfon's body was half airborne.

Afterwards, standing in front of Nina was the back figure of an old man with thin iron whips in his hands.

She remembered that back.

".....No way."

It was very unexpected that she could think of this back in the midst of confusion.

However, Nina had relied on this back, no, actually it should have been the iron whips in the other party's hand and his standing posture that made her think of his identity.

Being able to think of who the other person was, and that this other party was an existence from her own memories, made Nina feel even more surprised.

"Great-grandfather!"

"It's been a long time, Nina."

The old man turned around. Behind him, Layfon had fallen in an area far away. Nina thought of helping him, but the atmosphere emanating from her great-grandfather didn't allow Nina to leave her position.

Repeatedly using artificial hibernation, long ago becoming the dragon of the Antalk family, the elder Military Artist whom Nina revered the most stood in front of her.

Gildred Antalk was here.

"Great-grandfather, why.....?"

Nina couldn't understand why he would appear here. Her great-grandfather should only appear in urgent situations to protect Schneibel, or would only emerge from artificial hibernation for periodic health checkups, so that Nina had only seen him two or three times.

Even so, at a glance, her great-grandfather definitely didn't give off a strong impression. Her great-grandfather wasn't large and muscular like her parents, at first glance looking like an elderly recluse that was difficult to get along with, but his strength surpassed her parents'. The scene of all the Antalk family Military Artists rushing at him, but her great-grandfather deflecting them all, was still vividly imprinted in her memories.

"Great-grandfather is Schneibel's patron saint."

She remembered her parents saying this.

Why would this kind of great-grandfather stand in this place?

"Do you think this old man wouldn't know of the things that happened between Schneibel and Zuellni?"

"Then....."

Her great-grandfather had relations with the Electronic Fairy Schneibel. They knew the same information, and made preparations for the same goals. Was that how things were?

"That's right, so this old man has come, to destroy what should be destroyed. Afterwards, I will save my poor great-granddaughter from Zuellni's trickery."

"Zuellni wouldn't do that kind of thing!"

"If that were so, why would she want to remain silent?"

"Well.....!"

"What reasons did she have to remain silent? To protect hostages? That's right. For an Electronic Fairy, protecting the people in the face of a threat is the correct way of doing things. Though, are things really like that? If it was only to protect hostages, why didn't she spread warnings through En? The dice of fate have already been tossed, and a nightmare has fallen on Grendan. We already have no way to avoid the struggle under the moon. The cause and effect forged from the beginning of creation will be settled today. Chaos is disturbing this great earth. In this kind of situation there will certainly be people who will die, certainly people who get wounded, and certainly people who are destroyed. Powerful sides will clash against each other, and it is impossible to reconcile. Until one of them perishes, this battlefield will continue on. The upcoming moment will be determined. However, why does Zuellni remain silent? Could it be that you know the answer?"

"....."

Nina couldn't respond.

It was because she also held doubts towards Zuellni. It wasn't like Zuellni couldn't talk. However, even if Nina had already understood Vati's true colors, and knew the things that had happened between Zuellni and Schneibel, Zuellni still didn't want to tell Nina anything. Zuellni acting this way felt very unnatural to Nina, and made her feel uncertain.

But.....

"Zuellni gave me this."

Nina restored the Dites in her hands.

They were things formed by the conglomeration of the Electronic Fairy's power. Because Nina had been possessed by the Haikizoku, ordinary Dites could not bear her full Kei output. Because she was like this, Zuellni had formed these weapons.

"During that impasse, in that kind of situation where she might have to save herself, she trusted me, and gave me these weapons. Betting on what Zuellni has done for me, I definitely will not betray her."

"Hmm, so that's how it is, that reply indeed has our family's style."

Gildred's expression relaxed for a moment.

Though, that expression truly lasted for only a moment. The wrinkles that floated on his cheeks disappeared, putting on a severe face. The pressure released from his entire body pushed Nina. The two feet that struggled to support Nina's body dug two shallow marks in the ground.

"Then, with an iron will, a will that crushes steel, I will forcefully take you back to Schneibel."

"I won't let you succeed!"

Nina yelled, reclaiming her momentum with a roar.

She understood that her current status was not enough to fight her Grandfather's Kei.

"Melnisc!"

So, Nina let out a breath, waking the Haikizoku hiding within her body.

The golden goat awoke.

The golden light surrounded Nina, bursting out from her in all directions. Strength entered her Kei vein, its beating became stronger and faster, and the rapid rise of pressure in her body made her feel giddy.

Gildred pointed his iron whips that were thinner than Nina's at the ground,

gazing at her change.

"Well, so that's how it was....."

The old man's eyebrows furrowed seriously, continuing to stare at Nina.

However he looked, what he saw didn't resemble Nina, but rather was the Haikizoku inside her.

"This is your strength? Since this is the case, we no longer need to speak. Display your ambition and the strength of your will in front of me, show it to me!"

"Yes!"

Nina yelled to reply.

She ran quickly.

Charging forward.

Closing in.

Nina injected her will, her Kei, and her strength into her iron whip, letting the energy flow. In order to make her great-grandfather understand, a strike to make him return to Schneibel, with evidence that she would accomplish her goal, with the strength of her trust in Zuellni.....

"I'll show it all to you!"

Combined Internal and External Kei variant - Raijin.

Her speed took the form of lightning, as she raised the iron whip high. The distance between the two was covered in an instant, and the shockwave followed from behind.

Nina poured all of her energy into the iron whip, striking towards Gildred.

The lightning covered every corner of her vision.

A force transmitted up the iron whip and through her arm, then out through the back. The objective of the strike was that feeling.

".....Is that your limit?"

She couldn't fully reach that feeling of the iron whip, and a verbal blow

entered Nina's ears.

Gildred stood in front of her. He crossed his iron whips blocking Nina's Raijin, standing there, without even a speck of dust staining his clothing.

The old man's face was stern, and looked sharply at Nina.

"You should have already seen Grendan's Heaven's Blades. You should know that the power you have is not unique to yourself. Even if it is a special power, you should know that it's only of this level after all. Even so, if you still insist on walking this path of thorns....."

"Wu....."

The pressure increased. The Kei flow that Gildred released increased. Nina's stance meant for using Raijin endured the push of this pressure. To push back the old man's strength, she let Kei run through her body, and roared at Melnisc in her consciousness.

However, Nina was pushed back inch by inch.

Gildred stood in his original location without moving a step.

"Armadune."

Gildred mumbled this.

Nina did not instantly understand what this word indicated.

But in the end he was telling her the answer.

The Kei flow increased explosively once more, and this time Nina was unable to stop it and was blown backwards.

In the moment that she was sent flying, Nina saw that scene.



"How can this be....."

She thought this in her heart, but also felt that it was extremely reasonable. The origin of Electronic Fairies, Schneibel. The mother of all the Electronic Fairies, Schneibel. The empty city carrying her great-grandfather.

The Senou City's patron saint.

Gildred Antalk.

He was this kind of person.

Even if his Kei color had become golden, it still wasn't surprising.

Even if he had been possessed by a Haikizoku, it still shouldn't be that unusual of a circumstance.

The machinery next to her great-grandfather's foot vibrated, then collapsed. Its substance had collapsed just from the pressure of his Kei.

"Come, I will let you experience what is a full consciousness, and the strength of sacrifice and determination."

"Ugh!"

Gildred lifted his iron whips. When she heard the roaring sound in the air, Nina leaped high up. At that moment, her great-grandfather's figure had already moved to Nina's position. He attacked with his iron whips. The iron whips whose strike reached the ground spread forth ripples, which collapsed a moment later.

Gildred should have been standing next to the collapsed machinery, but his figure had already disappeared. Nina who was halfway in the air intuitively changed the direction of her body, raising her iron whips to assume a stance.

Gildred was there. Iron whips gnawed at each other, and the shockwaves produced spread over Nina's entire body. Her body was paralyzed, and she fell out of the air.

Gildred who used only iron whips like Nina hurtled towards the ground with her. As the two of them fell, they used their iron whips to trade strikes. The shockwaves produced by the iron whips colliding against each other randomly changed the path of their fall.

The mutually pestering iron whips were regulated by Gildred's Kei flow. This was a Kei technique that Nina did not know. Since she had lost to her opponent in Kei ability, Nina could not use her strength to free her weapons. She could only feel anxious premonitions about her back's continuous approach to the ground as she traded blows with Gildred.

"Hah!"

The exchange of blows was only brandishing the iron whips at full power, and she didn't have any skills to speak of. Strike out with the iron whip, the iron whips would collide, and then at the same time bounce back. There was a gap in the simple level of strength, and there was also a gap in the speed at which the flying iron whips were pulled back. When a gap appeared, she would lose the opportunity to strike her opponent's weapon with all her power, and afterwards in their competition of strength she would fall downwards even more.

During that fall, exactly how many times did those two trade blows? Nina had lost count long ago. Even so, that she could still compete with her great-grandfather could only be said to be her great-grandfather's mercy.

"Uwah!"

Nina felt impatient at herself who could only let out depressed cries, as her back hit the ground. There was the bursting of machinery. The strength that held the iron whips together disappeared, and the figure of Gildred leaping backwards seemed fuzzy. The impact sent through her back made Nina lose consciousness for a moment, and if she had not used Kongoukei in time, she would definitely have fainted.

Under the strength produced by this impact, Nina's body didn't even bounce back, and she was pressed into the smashed machinery.

"With only that kind of level you want to become the enemy of the world? Don't make me laugh."

Her great-grandfather's words echoed through the pain of Kongoukei.

Why had she become like this? The pain of her body shook her determination, spawning cowardice, bringing doubts.

She had been named the enemy of the world by her hometown's Electronic Fairy Schneibel, and her respected and loved great-grandfather had also come here. Fighting, getting wounded..... why had she become like this?

"The one that we want to defeat is obviously the same enemy....."

"....."

"Why? Great-grandfather!"

Nina shouted at the bottom of the pit formed by the machinery.

"What skillful words."

Gildred who was overlooking that place refuted Nina's shouts:

"If we had to unite in order to win, then that would have to become the core of our determination. Because the doctrines we pursue or our viewpoints are different, if we integrate our determination, we will be able to achieve our goals in the end. But, Zuellni has not shown this kind of determination. She is unwilling to join Schneibel's rope. Therefore, she is an impurity who will cut the rope, a filthy existence who will soil the rope. What Schneibel has carved out, what all of the Electronic Fairies hope for, the Blade of Destiny that this old man would not hesitate to abandon his life to create, is clouded because of her existence, so we must defeat her, that reason is not strange at all!"

"No!"

"You think you're the center of the world while only knowing pieces of the truth? Do you think that the only kind and honest existences in the world are the ones that you protect yourself? That something with a childish appearance cannot be evil? Will you start crying, now that you cannot accomplish your goals through force?"

Gildred's speech spilled towards Nina. His Kei pressure had also elevated along with his denouncement.

He was angry, her great-grandfather was angry. Nina's immature words had made him feel anger, and his Kei also carried forth his passionate emotions.

"You, do you understand the significance of the words that you say?"

The iron whips were raised high.

They were coming. Nina took a stance, preparing Kongoukei.

"I will correct your immature way of thinking!"

The iron whip attacked. The arriving blow made Nina close her eyes. She put her iron whips across her chest. Would she really be able to block this strike? Nina didn't have the confidence. Perhaps this time her body would penetrate the machinery, and would continue falling down to the underground facility. At that time, would this city still be unharmed? Though, this kind of worry was only superfluous, because Nina might already be dead at that time.

However, the angry hammer did not come to Nina's body.

".....?"

Alarmed, Nina..... opened her eyes. Perhaps this was just a false alarm to distract her? Nina thought the possibility that she was being teased was next to nothing. Was her great-grandfather one to perform this kind of mischief? Having not been with her great-grandfather in a long time, she didn't know the answer.

She raised her head.

Gildred was not looking at Nina.

His eyes were looking outside of the city, a low sound coming from his throat.

".....So it's come."

She heard the old man mumbling this.



Meishen and Vati's morning started very early, because they needed to bake the cakes for today before school.

Vati made the dough for sponge cake in a special big bowl, while shifting her sight to the automatic eggbeater. However, her order of actions had not become arbitrary. She removed the finger on the switch of the eggbeater, and after Meishen's trusted winning dough was poured into a mold, prepared to

begin baking the cake.

However, her eyes still looked at a different place.

"How amazing, Vati's hands are so skillful."

"Sorry."

Vati looked at a different place as she appeared to be making cakes, making Meishen widen her eyes in surprise.

"Nnn~ it's okay if I haven't lost. But..... is something bothering you?"

"No....."

That was a lie.

However, she couldn't explain the situation. Outside the Academy City, 372 Kilomels away, there were two people who knew Vati's real identity, who were swayed to push their powers to the limit in order to defeat Vati.

Nina was in battle to protect a secret, to keep her opponent from drawing close to the Academy City.

When the object being protected was very large, the damage that could be tolerated would become large. Even if the people in the Academy City didn't know the truth, Vati's true face had long since been transmitted over the Electronic Fairies' network.

To protect the world, even if they sacrificed this Academy City, was this also an acceptable damage tolerance?

".....Things can't be like that."

"Huh?"

"Sorry, I was talking to myself."

"Really? If there's anything bothering you feel free to talk about it, I hope I can help you."

"Thanks."

After thanking Meishen, Vati adopted an appearance of working seriously. She had already entered the most suitable mode of operation to make cakes, so

she wouldn't fail even if she averted her gaze. However, she couldn't let Meishen hold those unnecessary emotions.

Vati opened the oven, putting the cake in the mold inside, while sending out necessary instructions.

Her instructions served their purpose in a place 372 Kilomels away.



Gildred saw that being. He felt slightly surprised. The area that the Senou City operated in was rather peaceful, so to Gildred who lived in that kind of area, it was his first time seeing this type of threat. Even so, Gildred's surprise was still slight and nothing more.

"I see, this is the legendary aged phase?"

The old man's anger towards Nina dispersed, and he looked at that being full of spirit.

That thing was climbing on top of the city's leg. That thing with a giant eye as big as Gildred.

That thing's outer skin showed a luster like a carefully polished rock, reflecting the sunlight.

It was a giant, a giant that looked like it was wearing heavy clothing.

It was climbing on the city's leg, climbing above the outlying area. It really was too large, dragging its incredibly heavy body upright to stand up. The ground shook, the city shook, his changing of his heavy balance made everything in the city cry out.

".....What do you plan to do to this old man's Armadune?"

The sound of tearing metal from the sky made Gildred mumble this.

He moved.

Gildred moved his body rapidly, arriving in front of the giant.

"Release your dirty hands, you worthless creature!"

Gildred struck with his iron whips in a line, harshly beating the giant's armored nose. It couldn't be told whether it was flesh or iron that produced a heavy sound that rippled through the air, and the giant's body tilted upwards, falling down.

Gildred landed in the outlying area, overlooking the giant that had fallen by the city's leg.

"Did you get close while Armadune had not yet appeared? In that case, you're also a minion?"

The fallen giant shook the wilderness, trying to rise.

"Hm."

Gildred snorted with an uninterested face.

He seemed to be thinking as he covered his mouth with his hand.

From the gaps between his fingers, one could see that his lips were slightly curved in a smile.

It was a fierce smile.

"Alright. Since it's like this, this old man will let you witness the strength that has been honed to hunt you, and to defeat your determination."

The old man once again raised his iron whips.

"Dischale."

He intoned.

"Tentorium."

He intoned.

"Falysodam."

He intoned.

He so intoned, calling three names. Who were the names that were called, and what kind of existences were they?

The answer was quickly revealed.

By Gildred's side jumped out several radiances. They were immediately

absorbed by the golden light released by the old man, and afterwards merged into one, followed by an increase in power.

"Armadune, strengthen the battlefield."

The light moved, forming fluctuations under the old man's feet, and was absorbed into the ground. Sounds came from behind him, the sounds of the machinery beginning self-repair. Behind him, came the sound of Nina hustling to leave the pit. Perhaps it was the rapidly squirming machinery that made her feel uncomfortable, she prepared to prop up her collapsed companion.

"Wouldn't it be fine if you just stayed in your position?"

He felt the air with his back while mumbling. He had already used the city's Electronic Fairy Armadune's battlefield strengthening to promote the machinery's strength. In this city without refugees, the safest place was amidst the machinery.

".....It'll be fine to watch from here."

However, the old man said this.

It was fine just to let her see and understand the difference in strength. Though if she surrendered from only this, then she couldn't be counted as a member of the Antalk family. However, it was possible that perhaps she would change her thinking.

Facing this fate, that kind of identity didn't suit an Academy City.

"Come to the battlefield of this old man."

Gildred jumped. No, he dropped.

He almost fearlessly passed through the air shield, moving from the outskirts to besides the giant's foot. He had not restored his iron whips, and they were held in the old man's weapon belt by his waist.

Pollutants burned Gildred. Even if he were exposed to the loathed blaze, the old man's expression had no change.

The giant who had climbed back up raised its fist, and then struck out with power.

The giant's fist had power and size as well as speed, and it was more than enough to say that it wanted to squash Gildred's body like a bug.

However, Gildred was not squashed.

Gildred stood nearby facing its giant body. He touched down, bringing his arm back and raising his fist to confront his power.

The conflict broke out.

Explosions were produced in the air as the giant mass roared. It was only reasonable that the outcome of the conflict could only bring the old man an unbearably cruel death.

But Gildred was the patron saint of the Senou City. He manipulated the empty city Armadune, and had called forth three Electronic Fairies.

The golden light surrounding his body overturned the unreasonable gap in size.

"Hm."

In front of his extended fist was the giant fist covering his own figure. Seeing this giant fist, Gildred's heart was still confident. The fist stopped. The giant had poured all of its power into the fist, but Gildred's fist had not been pushed back.

Gildred opened his fist, grabbing the giant's clenched finger.

"I'm quite sorry to make you leave. If you really wanted to climb that much, then this old man will entertain you on the battlefield."

Gripping its finger, he poured power into it..... Then, the giant who was being held began to rotate. An incredible scene unfolded, the strange scene of this giant being whirled by an old man only as big as his fingertip.

However, this scene was what happened in reality. The old man whirled the giant, and the fierce wind produced by this motion howled as if to shake the ground. Then, the old man threw the giant.

The giant rose while producing a loud sound of its mass hurtling through the air, and then fell. Gildred chased the giant, following the parabolic path of the giant.

"Why don't you drop here for me."

He descended towards the giant's abdomen with a kick.

The giant's path of descent changed, and produced a cloud of dust in the middle of the city.

"Come, let this old man properly confirm how firm you are."

Gildred once again restored his Dites, raising the two iron whips and taking a stance.

"After all, I've already become this old, but still haven't run into an aged phase. You've only existed in name, and I've become a real elderly man, so you should pay your respects to the elderly."

Gildred brought out a bold smile, raising the iron whips in his hands high. The giant reached out his arm to try to grab the old man from his movements, and no effects could be seen to be produced from its being thrown just now.

However, it had no way to change the bulky body that it brought.

The iron whips struck forth a step faster.

Golden ripples spread in all directions. The giant's hand stopped moving, and its whole body shook. Vibrations from the blow covered the giant, and spread to the entire city, shaking the air.

Just like Vati, the giant was composed of very small nanomachines. The blow and the vibration had smashed them, and from the blow the surroundings and throughout the giant's body became sand and sprayed out. The nanomachines turned into white smoke, covering the giant's figure.

The next blow scattered the white smoke, and once again produced white smoke enveloping Gildred. The giant's movements were blocked by the vibrations produced by the blows of the two iron whips, and it could not use any skills.

Gildred's attacks still continued. His breathing had not become disordered, and his attack power almost had not declined. Though the city still shook, it did not receive any effects from Gildred's strong destructive force, so it seemed that the Electronic Fairy Armadune's battlefield strengthening had been

effective.

However, Nina didn't understand it.

".....What is this?"

Standing on the shaking machinery, Nina carried Layfon on her shoulder as she viewed this scene.

It was an incredible scene.

No, if only the old man's strength were considered, Grendan's Heaven's Blade successors could also possibly do this. Perhaps they could perform even stronger skills. After all, Nina had experienced the force of their Kei with her own body, and seen their frightening techniques with her own eyes.

What surprised Nina was not that Gildred could do this. No, Nina obviously felt surprised at that, but the thing in her vision made her feel more surprised.

It was the Electronic Fairy.

Even though she was separated far away, Nina had heard Gildred calling three names. She had not let go of her focus as Gildred moved and acted on the battlefield, and Nina had not missed hearing the intonations of her great-grandfather. She had only heard those names, perhaps she still did not know what meaning those actions stood for. However, she understood everything just from seeing the phenomenon that happened afterwards.

The strengthening golden light that was released from Gildred's entire body, the things that had appeared as if they were heat illusion were Electronic Fairies.

"Melnisc, that really is....."

(They are not Haikizoku.)

"What did you say?"

The response sent from the Haikizoku inside her body made Nina take a puzzled voice.

(Those are not things produced from the hatred of losing their city, but are beings that voluntarily became that way.)

".....Voluntarily?"

(Haikizokus are Electronic Fairies who want to become cities, changed from their anger and hatred at losing everything. However, those Electronic Fairies do not want to become cities, they have wanted to become blades for the world since the beginning, so they have lent their power to Military Artists.)

"How....."

(Isn't there such an existence inside your body?)

".....Huh? Ah!"

When Melnisc said this, Nina thought of that event. No, she had not forgotten that event, but she had not thought that it had become that kind of being.

When Nina was still in Schneibel, she had witnessed a kidnapping of an Electronic Fairy. Nina's sense of justice had made her chase the culprit. But in the end, she suffered severe wounds. [\[1\]](#)

When no one had come to save her, the kidnapped Electronic Fairy had saved Nina.

It was a small Electronic Fairy who had not even been given a name.

Nina had felt that it was a very sorrowful thing. Fighting from then on, Nina had begun thinking of the meaning that Military Artists stood for, because she decided to leave the hometown she had been born in.

Afterwards, she had met Zuellni.

(Your Kei vein has almost been restructured by electromagnetic bonds produced by Electronic Fairies. That is where the Electronic Fairy is.)

".....What does that mean?"

(It means that Electronic Fairies have made your body into a residence. As long as the Electronic Fairy continues to grow, your body's Kei vein will follow and grow alongside. For ordinary Military Artists, Kei veins shouldn't be something that can grow like that.)

Indeed, Nina had heard of that kind of thing. Kei vein growth in Military Artists would cause symptoms like disease.

"Then, I have only become strong by your blessings?"

This came as somewhat of a blow to Nina. The thing regarding Melnisc was something that Nina had decided herself. As for the other Electronic Fairy, Nina felt very sorrowful, not wanting it to have died in vain, but she had not thought that it was so connected with her own body.

Regardless of whether it was in the past or the present, Nina had always striven and struggled to become strong. If the outcome wasn't even from her own efforts, and only came from the growth of the Electronic Fairy in her body, then what was the meaning of everything she had paid after all?

(You could say that. But, that you can control me is because you have a strong heart, and isn't that also the reason why that nameless compatriot dedicated itself to you? Even so, your strength right now is your own strength. The problem is not the nature of your strength, but how you use your possessions.)

".....Is it possible that I'm being comforted right now?"

(Do you have the strength to make jokes?)

"Ah, sorry."

Melnisc's words allowed Nina's mood to calm down. The important question was not whether the things inside Gildred's body were Haikizoku or not.

Rather it was if they were Electronic Fairies born in Schneibel, and whether Electronic Fairies also had that kind of use.

Nina didn't understand at all. Was this because Nina's age had not reached the point where she could understand this, or was it because her strength was not sufficient?

However, there was only a small group of people who knew of this, and even her parents did not know. Was it only people with status similar to Gildred who knew this?

Moreover her great-grandfather knew about Vati, that meant Schneibel and Gildred contacted each other.

"Therefore..... it was Schneibel who let those Electronic Fairies do that?"

Electronic Fairies would turn themselves into strength, and dedicate

themselves to Military Artists?

In order to reach the goal of the Electronic Fairies.

In other words, Electronic Fairies, or perhaps Schneibel, had this degree of consciousness.

The entire world's Electronic Fairies, were they all really dedicating themselves for this battle?

Was it only Zuellni who attempted to defy this trend?

Was it to protect the inhabitants of the Academy City?

"....."

Nina didn't feel that Zuellni was wrong. But, she also didn't think Schneibel was wrong. One was protecting her own city, one was protecting the world, but the problem was the proportions were different. If the world was destroyed, the Academy City would also be destroyed. Still, it couldn't be said that the Academy City could perish for the world..... Nina couldn't give voice to those words. Nina could never give up on Zuellni.

There was only one enemy - Vati Len. No, she was named Lævateinn and was the bane of the world.

Just one person, nothing more. However, that enemy was far too powerful, and could not be dealt with.

It was the same as the situation in front of her eyes. Gildred seemed to be in a dominant position, but she feared that perhaps that were not so.

On the other hand, why had that aged phase giant chosen this opportunity to suddenly appear in this place after all?

Had the city that was carrying her great-grandfather not noticed it? Had Felli's Psychokinesis been unable to notice that giant creature?

That was impossible. Nina dared to assert that, because she trusted the abilities of the Electronic Fairies, and trusted Felli's abilities.

Then, the one who sent this giant here was Vati. Moreover, Vati could clearly witness what happened here.

That meant she couldn't divulge her information.

Nina couldn't say anything to Layfon.

If she said it, perhaps Vati would begin moving, and perhaps the Academy City would perish.

".....All things considered, I should first put Layfon in a safe place."

Even though Nina was worried about the unconscious Layfon, she didn't feel that the enemies were only that giant. If Vati was monitoring this place, if she assessed her great-grandfather's strength here, then it wouldn't be surprising if other enemies appeared.

Nina looked around her. However, the wide area that was covered with machinery was only a boundless plain, and there wasn't even an emergency shelter. No, if the battle became intense, the level of a shelter wouldn't even be safe.

What should she do..... Just as Nina thought this, her foot experienced a shock.

This shock didn't come from Gildred's battle.

"What is that?"

As Nina examined the situation, the ground nearby quickly changed. The tubes that constituted the nearby machinery started to wriggle, and a tunnel appeared there.

As Nina probed into the tunnel, it became even wider and deeper.

"You want me to use this place to protect Layfon?"

She asked this of the Electronic Fairy who was not here.

However, a feeling naturally emerged in Nina, as if the Electronic Fairy of this city were saying to her, 'you hide in here too'.

"Can I entrust Layfon to you?"

Even if she were only being oversuspicious, Nina still shook her head, and spoke a request. The other party didn't have any voice to reply with. However, Nina could feel that the sigh-like atmosphere inside the tunnel became stronger

than before.

This produced a sort of feeling in Nina like when she communicated with Zuellni.

No, perhaps it was really the case. Even if she couldn't see the figure of the other party, Nina at this moment was talking with the Electronic Fairy of this city.

That she was able to communicate with this Electronic Fairy, as well as that event she saw involving Schneibel, didn't they have something to do with the Electronic Fairy housed inside her body?

That moment, Nina almost thought of that event badly, and so began self-reflection. Because of the assistance of that Electronic Fairy, Nina had been saved, was able to meet Zuellni, and Layfon, and everyone in the seventeenth platoon, and many, many other people.

If she thought of that event as a bad thing, then every event would be just as bad. Hadn't Melnisc said that kind of thing to her?

"I have a request."

Nina gazed into the tunnel that had appeared there, while saying:

"I cannot hide here. But, Layfon has only been caught up in this battle. Right now I cannot let him realize the truth. So, please."

The atmosphere quieted down.

The lack of a response made Nina feel uncomfortable. Just as she pondered whether to put Layfon in the tunnel, just as she was about to leave, she saw some activity in the interior of the tunnel.

In order to spread open the tunnel, several tubes were crawling towards Nina.

Nina felt that that kind of slow movement was like saying 'Give him here' in a rude tone.

"Th..... thank you."

A scene that she was not used to made Nina feel confused, but she felt very happy in her heart. The Electronic Fairy understood her way of thinking. She

carefully and warily passed Layfon over. Unexpectedly, the tubes firmly received Layfon, and carried him into the depths of the tunnel.

During the carrying process, other tubes began sealing the tunnel.

"Sorry."

Layfon was gradually obscured by tubes. Apologizing to him, Nina headed towards the battle.

Chapter 5: Lost Child of Fate

He had a dream about the orphanage.

Everyone was at the big table preparing for dinner. Layfon and the others arranged the plates, and from the kitchen behind him came Lucia's voice. The younger Toby and the others brought over many plates, and Layfon received the plates. A delicious aroma floated from the kitchen, and the children who weren't helping and playing nearby came to the table one after another when they smelled the aroma.

Peeking through the cracks, the figure of Leerin could be seen following Lucia's instructions to prepare dishes.

Lumina called out to go find their adoptive father to eat dinner, and several children who heard her instructions cheered while they ran out. Lucia upsettedly said, "Dust will fly into the food!"

The adoptive father who was pulled by the children had a smile on his face.

He instantly realized that this was a dream.

Because this was something that he had already lost. Even if he had already made up with Toby and the others, Layfon couldn't return to Grendan. Even if he returned there after graduating, the atmosphere of that time already no longer existed, and Toby and the others would have possibly left the orphanage. More importantly, the already independent Layfon wouldn't return to live at the orphanage.

Then, what if he returned with the identity of a Military Artist? It didn't seem like this way of thinking could become reality. Leerin was in the palace, a member of the three royal families stationed next to the Queen. She had abandoned Layfon. In this situation, perhaps it would be impossible to return to Grendan even with the identity of a Military Artist.

Layfon still didn't know what he could do outside of being a Military Artist. In the first place, he did not know the place for him in Grendan.

As he arranged the plates in his dream, he thought of these things.

Their adoptive father came to sit at the table, and the others began sitting down. Leerin sat next to Layfon, a slight smile on her face.

Leerin's young, smiling face made Layfon very sad, but also let him feel a slight comforting feeling. Just then, the surroundings suddenly darkened.

Everything became calm.

".....Huh?"

In the dream, Layfon first uttered a voice, and the sound returned to his own ears so loudly that he himself almost jumped.

He awoke at this moment.

Everything here was covered with darkness, and Layfon was the only person left.

".....Where is this?"

Layfon's head was still groggy. The fragments of his dream still lingered in his mind, becoming painful solitude inside his heart.

Was this darkness a dream, or was it reality.....

".....Captain?"

The fog that covered his brain quickly dissipated. Layfon could only have fainted after receiving a blow.

"Damn, how long have I been unconscious for?"

He hadn't been shamed like this since he was very small. Layfon used internal Kei to heighten his clarity, while examining the surrounding environment. Judging by the feeling of his feet, under him should be the machinery that had been uncovered in the city just now. Then, did that mean that he was still in that city?

But, in that city that was all flat earth, where did it have this kind of place.....

"Underground?"

Layfon couldn't find any other reasoning that could explain this conclusion. Since this city did not have buildings, and no sunlight was shining in his surroundings, this could only be underground.

Layfon felt his weapon belt, and only the Adamantium Dite was left. Layfon reached his hand out and fumbled around him, noticing that the restored Sapphire Dite and Shim Adamantium Dite were nearby, letting him release his breath.

"But, Captain?"

Even if he searched his surroundings, it didn't seem like there were any people other than himself in this space. Layfon repressed his anxious emotions, and used the Sapphire Dite to send steel threads in every direction.

The touch of the steel threads told Layfon of the surrounding conditions: this was a reasonably wide spherical space.

"Have I been caught?"

This situation seemed as if he had been sent to prison.

"Captain too?"

Judging from the unexpected manner of attack earlier, the opponent had used some unknown feature of the city, yet it wasn't something ordinary. Then, right now was Nina facing the same plight?

"Damn!"

His shameful performance of fainting made Layfon unable to resist clenching his teeth. Himself who had made that kind of lapse in this kind of place, how could he think of meddling in the business that Nina could be concealing?

The empty city.

Layfon had never heard of this kind of city. This wasn't the ghost city that was often heard of in scary stories. That was a city that had been raided by filth monsters and had perished, but still wandered on this earth. Thinking back, perhaps that had been pointing at the Haikizoku.

But, this city was different.

However he thought of it, this was a city that had no residents since the beginning. Regardless of how he thought, it could only be moving around without people because it had some aim. Moreover, the only resident of this city should be that enigmatic attacker, right?

Why would this kind of thing approach an Academy City? What had happened to Nina this time?

What he could be sure of was that something had happened. Moreover this event definitely had something to do with the battlefield in Grendan.

What he had to do now was confirm with his own eyes what had happened, and see through its true nature.

At this juncture, if Felli were here..... Layfon couldn't bear that kind of thought. Felli was a Psychokinesist, and Layfon didn't think there was a good place to protect her here, even though Felli could help with things other than Psychokinesis, and perhaps could see oddities that Layfon couldn't. Layfon always missed many things, and Felli could perhaps notice crucial matters that Layfon would be unable to find by himself.

However, Felli was not here right now. In this unknown situation, Felli and the others returning here was definitely not a good thing. Layfon couldn't make that decision.

More importantly, even if he did make the decision, the fact that Felli wasn't here couldn't be changed.

Only Layfon and Nina were here.

"I can only rely on myself."

Layfon used the steel threads with more concentration than before. The surroundings were all covered by machinery. However, Layfon didn't feel that he had trouble breathing, which indicated that there must be something around that could serve as a air hold.

Layfon upgraded his five senses and the sensitivity of his steel threads to the limit, looking for leaking wind.

As he carried out the search with his steel threads, his movements became more precise, and his focus increased. Just as Layfon felt that his brain was about to explode, he finally found that place.

It was really a very small hole. There were countless numbers of these small holes, and they were everywhere, so air could leak into this space. Since the machinery was composed of tubes, it meant that it could breathe by itself. This space should be where pressure was collected during breathing, and then this strength would be used to circulate air.

"Okay!"

Even though he had no way of entering, he could let his steel threads go through. If he didn't first extend his steel threads out onto the surface to grasp the situation outside and his location.....

The operation that taxed his nerves continued, until finally, the steel threads felt a strong wind blowing.

The steel threads had reached the outside, and this was.....?

"The city's outskirts? The underside, huh? Since it's like this....."

Layfon extended his steel threads upwards.

During this process, the steel threads felt a strong shockwave.

"What? A battle? Who's fighting?"

The shockwave that he felt wasn't energy that an ordinary Military Artist could create. Layfon quickened the movements of the steel threads, focusing his nerves on his sense of touch.

The earth transmitted the vigorous shaking produced by a giant mass.

"It isn't a fight between Military Artists?"

Even if Nina was currently fighting with that attacker, Layfon couldn't understand why there would be such strong vibrations. There was a significant time difference between the feeling of Kei flow and the vibration.

It felt like something like a giant was being disturbed.

"Could it be that there are filth monsters on the surface?"

However, Layfon who was staying in this place couldn't feel any vibrations. This was evidence of the machinery absorbing the impact.

"What's going on?"

Layfon couldn't understand the situation. When had the battle started? Judging from the strength of that attacker, if the enemy was an ordinary mature phase, regardless of its stage he should be able to relaxedly defeat it.

However, after he felt a strong ripple of Kei, the vibration of the giant things quick movement would be sent through the steel thread.

Then, the thing above was an aged phase.

Why would there be an aged phase in this kind of place? Then didn't that mean the information about filth monsters in this place was incorrect? Assuming he had stayed in this city for a whole day, at this distance, could Felli's Psychokinesis be unable to find an aged phase?

However, the response from above could only be produced by an aged phase.

".....Calm down."

Perhaps he was focusing too much on the steel threads, and Layfon had produced an excessive response to the change in conditions. He breathed deeply to calm himself down.

"First let's ignore that, I should find the Captain."

He still had other things to do. If he didn't save Nina, nothing else needed to be mentioned.

Was Nina one of the people on the battlefield?

"Can't be."

The feeling of the Kei flow raging in the city above did not come from Nina.

Then, where was Nina?

In order to find Nina, Layfon's steel threads sped through the city.



Compared to Layfon who totally couldn't find any clues and could only search for Nina under the circumstances, Nina had no time to watch the fight between her great-grandfather and the giant.

"I didn't expect anything like that."

She could only blankly mumble.

After handing over Layfon to the city's Electronic Fairy, Nina had run to her great-grandfather's battle. But, she immediately noticed a change. A sound came from a different place that was not the battlefield.

"How.....?"

The new, different sound produced an inauspicious premonition in Nina. Perhaps this was because of Nina's pessimism that nothing favorable to herself would happen here.

In the end, her premonition became real.

The sound came, and moreover the sound still continued from the direction of the city outskirts. After gazing in that direction, Nina was stunned.

Huge hands were gripping the city's outer edge.

It wasn't just one, nor was it two pairs of hands.

Three giants were preparing to climb the city's edge.

The climbing of the three giants made the city leg give off a sharp metallic sound. However, the city did not tilt. The sharp metallic noise was of the city's leg hitting the giant. The city had already prepared for the giants' attack, and did not sway due to the added weight.

Not to mention that it was originally an autonomous mobile city meant to carry countless people and buildings while walking. Perhaps this degree of weight was nothing after all.

Even so, to Nina, the added threat still did not change.

"Could it be....."

Vati had sent more giants here. Gildred knew Vati's true face, so Vati was

definitely planning not to allow Gildred to approach Zuellni.

She indeed meant to kill Gildred. To Vati, her great-grandfather was one hundred percent an enemy, and her actions also showed her animosity towards him.

"Does she want to kill him together with me?"

She had no reason to let Nina live. Therefore, taking advantage of this opportunity to kill Nina who knew the truth wasn't a strange thing to do. If she died in the city, perhaps it would lead to other peoples' suspicions, but if she died in a battle outside the city, wouldn't no one suspect anything?

Nina's heart did not hold the thought that it would be fine if she herself were saved, but she also could not deny her speculation of Vati, making her hair stand on end.

More importantly, confronting these sudden additional giants, she couldn't produce the thought that 'as long as she could defeat them everything will be over' at all.

The enemy's fighting power was unlimited.

Not knowing why, she had this sort of feeling.

Nina had the feeling that, other than the sounds from the battle and the movement of the giants..... other than her surrounding noise, another deeper part of the air was being disturbed. Could this be because Vati was taking action in some place that she herself couldn't see?

"Pathetic, it's no time to think about those things!"

The new giants made their debut, making Nina reproach herself for showing a cowardly attitude.

What did she hold in her hands? It was the wish of Zuellni that had been entrusted to her. What was inside her body? It was the Electronic Fairy that had saved her life, and the Haikizoku that trusted her.

"I don't have any time to be perplexed!"

The Dites were in her hands. They had already been restored, asserting their presence in Nina's two hands.

"Melnisc, come!"

(Ohh!)

Nina threw the Haikizoku's majestic roar behind her, charging towards the giants who had already climbed over the city.



As Nina roused her spirits and charged at the newly appeared giants, Layfon's steel threads also felt the change.

"The enemies have increased?"

However, Layfon could only rely on the vibrations sent through the steel threads to explore the situation outside, so he didn't understand whether this judgment was correct.

He understood that the moving creatures that had huge mass had increased by three.

However, he also felt a new Kei charging towards the huge bodies.

"What is the captain doing!"

Layfon had already worked out that those moving bodies were aged phases. Three more aged phases had appeared, and the current situation truly could only be called despair.

However, Nina seemed to not feel despair.

Perhaps she had already given up. Layfon wanted to be able to trust that she had not done this, but the current situation wasn't like that.

"I need to think of a good method....."

He had already fully confirmed the surrounding situation, so next he should take action.

Layfon used the steel threads to probe the surroundings. He didn't know how he had been placed here, as this place didn't have entrances or exits. However, after extending his steel threads to the outside, Layfon already understood his

current location, and roughly grasped his distance from the surface.

"It shouldn't be too thick to cut....."

The space here was sufficient. Layfon returned the steel threads to Dite form, and replaced the simpler Dite with the Adamantium Dite. Having replaced his weapon with the Dite that could best support his Kei, Layfon tightly grasped the large sword in his hand.

His Kei flowed.

Layfon confirmed the feeling of the Adamantium Dite in his hand, while interpreting its thresholds, converting energy into a Kei technique. He released his move, storing the energy.

"Ugh"

The pressure covering Layfon's entire body made him clench his teeth.

This was a new Kei technique that he had used in his battle against Claribel, which Layfon had named 'Composite Blast'. No one had ever left behind such a technique, because the number of people who could arrive at the realm where Dites could not sustain their Kei was far too small. An unusable technique would gradually be lost. Even if there had been someone like Layfon who created such a technique, that technique might have not survived or been passed down. There really weren't many ways to pass techniques outside of cities, and if this kind of a Military Artist were in Grendan, they would definitely have become a Heaven's Blade successor. Once they received a Heaven's Blade, this technique would become scrap.

However, to the current Layfon, this was an indispensable technique.

Release, storing the energy.

Release, storing the energy.

He repeated continuously.

As he repeated, the weight covering his body multiplied alongside. It was like Kirik had said before, cumulatively increasing the energy of an explosion that already had nowhere to go was quite unreasonable.

However, Layfon still repeated the move, continuously carrying it out. To

Layfon, this was just because he hadn't become skillful at the technique, and he was confident that soon enough he would be able to use it flexibly.

More importantly, right now he had to use it, so he did.

Release, storing the energy.

With the continuous repetitions, the blade's surrounding light lost its color, giving off a strong white light.

"!"

Layfon shook off his sweat, assuming the next posture with the Adamantium Dite, cutting the blade across the space above his head.

External-type Kei, Composite Blast variant - Kasane Sendan.

After Composite Blast had filled the blade, Layfon mixed them and wildly released the energy.

The skill turned into white light, becoming a giant ray pouring forth that lit up the surroundings. Kasane Sendan cut apart the machinery on the ceiling, and its heat melted and burned the tubes, continuously speeding forwards. Layfon confirmed the high-speed result with his own eyes. If the feeling sent by the steel threads was correct, this should open a hole to the surface.

Then go!

Layfon howled in his heart, leaping to the cracks generated by the Kasane Sendan. The wind produced by Layfon's heat left a burnt smell, as he advanced endlessly towards the surface.

The white light of Kasane Sendan was far ahead of him, and even though he was still destroying machinery, his speed was slower than he had thought. In order to keep Layfon from leaving, some machinery added strength to resist him.

"Damn!"

As he quickly chased Kasane Sendan, Layfon took up a stance again with the still-restored Adamantium Dite. Composite Blast. Though, the situation was fairly tense. He had no way to accumulate energy as he had before.

"Even so, I can still add power!"

External-type Kei, Composite Blast variant - Hunter's Pursuit.

In the process of unending training, Layfon had understood something. When he made changes to his Composite Blast skill, the edge of his Kei energy would become viscous. With a different Kei skill, it could be possible to add the power of Composite Blast to a move he had already released.

The flash ahead and the flash of him chasing it to add additional power superimposed with each other. After adding the power, the speed at which the flash destroyed the machinery rose.

Layfon chased the flash.

If his speed decreased, Layfon would stack on another Hunter's Pursuit, continuing to leap upwards.

Layfon used the cut-apart and Kei-scorched machinery as footholds to leap continuously, but even with destroying the solid machinery at a surprising speed, tubes would twist together and reconnect, once again forming machinery.

The re-formed machinery chased from behind.

If the power of Kasane Sendan ran out before reaching the surface, Layfon would become a prisoner in that place again. Or, if the speed at which the flash destroyed machinery was surpassed by the repairing speed, Layfon would also be enmeshed and face the same fate.

"How can I allow that....."

How could that happen! Layfon once again stacked on a flash while simultaneously leaping. During the process a rugged area that Layfon used as a foothold broke off, and he was almost in danger of tripping, but Layfon still followed the flash, and added his power.

Then, he suddenly broke out.

The radiance of the flash was gradually absorbed by the sun. Increasing its speed after losing resistance, the flash became a beam of light shooting into the city's sky.

Layfon who was chasing that flash also leaped out.

"What's the situation?"

Layfon gathered his steel threads while using his eyes to confirm the surrounding situation. The outskirts on the left had three giants, as well as the figure of Nina charging at them.

"Captain!"

Layfon yelled, trying to chase Nina.

"!"

But, he had to immediately stop his steps.

At the same time as he felt something, Layfon swept the Adamantium Dite behind him. The shockwave produced spread in all directions, and Layfon released the Sapphire Dite whose steel threads he couldn't completely gather up, restored the Shim Adamantium Dite, and released Kasane Sendan upwards.

The strike's white light immediately spread in all directions.

At the same time, Layfon also leaped backwards to increase the distance.

"Well done crossing me here."

The voice had an oppressive feeling like iron.

"I won't fall for the same trick twice!"

It was the old man, that enigmatic attacker. Layfon cautiously examined his opponent's every move. Even though the two iron whips clutched in the old man's hands were hanging down, the pressure emanating from his body had not disappeared.

"The way you use Kei is interesting."

The old man spiritedly watched Layfon.

"That aside, won't your Dite break? That's not it, is it just because it's somehow sturdier?"

The old man had long before perceived how Layfon had gotten here and what kind of Kei he had used.

However, that sort of thing was insignificant to Layfon.

Why would he choose this time to attack Layfon?

"Is that aged phase your minion?"

The first order of business should be defeating that aged phase, right? Judging from the feelings sent by the steel threads, this old man should have fought with the first giant. Then where had that giant gone? Had it been defeated by the old man before Layfon?

But, if that were true, why didn't he go to the other three giants?

To Layfon's question, the old man snorted:

"If she can't suppress that level of enemies before this old man goes over there, then I can't hold any higher expectations of her."

"Expectations?"

Why did this old man hold expectations of Nina?

How was this old man related with Nina? Did he know her?

"What's the meaning of this? Why do you do this?"

"This is all you need to know."

"What?"

"Who asked you to have that kind of technique..... Hey!"

The old man moved.

As the old man charged to him, Layfon leaped high to try to avoid him. During the process of using the steel threads to probe, Layfon had learned how much destructive power the old man had. Getting closer to fight was quite dangerous.

Not to mention that if they traded blows with their weapons, his own Dite wouldn't be able to handle it.

"That you don't have weapons that can exert your power means that fate has rejected you, kid!"

The movement of the old man seemed as if his onrush had braked. The old man changed the direction of his charge and again closed in on Layfon.

Layfon used external Kei to change his landing spot, but the old man completely ignored that kind of Kei, and charged forward.

"Ku!"

Layfon once again released Kei, managing to create some ground distance and time for himself. At the same time as he created distance, he released the Kei that he had been continuously gathering earlier.

Combined Internal and External Kei variant - Thousand Killers.

The moment, countless figures of Layfon appeared, each charging to a different place. This was a move that Layfon had stolen from Savaris and added his own changes to.

"Nuu!"

The unfamiliar technique made the old man's response time slow by half a step. But, he didn't charge at the countless Layfons, but the old man released Kei towards an unexpected direction.

Golden Kei emitted a brilliant luster, and then exploded. When the explosions faded, only one remaining Layfon stood there.

He had planned to directly go to Nina's side, but the old man had seen through him.

Layfon couldn't help but stop his steps, once again confronting the old man. The time this battle took almost made Layfon's breathing grow disorderly, but he quickly calmed down.

Layfon had almost never met an enemy who had enough strength to force him to face him and fight. His massive level of Kei wouldn't let the opponent have that kind of opportunity. Moreover, even if the opponent attempted strong moves, Layfon would reflect them back. He could do that because the massive difference in strength.

But now, between Layfon and the old man, the old man had the upper hand. He had the destructive power to kill an aged phase in such a short time, and he held Dites that could contain his great Kei.

In the end, right now he could only dodge the old man's attacks and wait for

an opportunity to make a reversal.

But, while he were doing this, if something happened to Nina.....

"You have time to be perplexed in front of me, how bold."

This sentence caught Layfon by surprise, but the old man did not seize the chance to attack, a smile of goodwill even emerging on his face.

"From your performance so far, you truly don't bear the fate."

"What are you saying....."

"Not much, just the madness of an old man, listen carefully."

"....."

Was he dragging out the time? Layfon examined the old man's manner, while moving to a position where he could see Nina.

"You don't have to worry about that side. To that girl, this is a necessary trial."

Layfon's gaze had stayed on the old man's body, but the other party had seen through his attempt.

"Every person has something called fate, youngster. Ah, I'm not saying that you don't have any fate at all. No, you don't have the fate to be entangled with us. You and us won't become comrades, but also shouldn't become enemies."

"That....."

'How should I know that'. Layfon thought of saying this, but the old man seemed to understand the situation that Nina confronted. His tone also confirmed that Nina was indeed hiding something.

"Captain..... is she involved with that fate?"

"Correct. Though, that girl won't speak the truth. It's not because she has no need to speak, but rather because she has no need to get you involved. No matter what happens, you have no way of hearing everything from her mouth, and this old man won't explain things either."

Had his thinking been seen through? What the old man said wasn't the answer that Layfon wanted.

"Kid, being uninvolved is a good thing, you shouldn't insist on meddling in this. You are a strong Military Artist deemed unnecessary, and you arrived here only because you weren't careful. Though, that's only up to now. The path ahead isn't a place for people like you who can't use their full strength and lack spirit."

"What did you say....."

Layfon said this. But, his weak tone even surprised himself.

"This old man has information on you. Layfon Alseif, who once received a Heaven's Blade in Grendan. But, fate has declared you to be a non-notable person, so the Heaven's Blade has left your hands."

"!"

"You have no need to fight. You should live out your own fate, and obediently leave this battlefield."

"By 'leave', you mean....."

"The underground of this city is safe. Until things finish, you should obediently hide there."

The moment the old man said this, Layfon felt mortified beyond comparison. At the same time, he thought of the time when Zuellni had first been attacked by filth monsters. At the time he had wanted Nina to flee, he had wanted her to take refuge.

Was Layfon currently feeling the anger that Nina had felt at that time?

No, she had a sense of mission that he himself did not, so it should be completely different.

Therefore.....

".....Stop joking."

Layfon's mouth uttered this sentence.

"You want me to flee, you want me to listen to you and hide underground?"

He couldn't stop himself from saying these words, and was eager to use even more intense language. However, regardless of how much he showed off his

tongue, he didn't feel that he would be able to fully express his current feelings.

"Stop joking!"

So, he ended it all with those words.

"Hum, indeed the words an energetic young man would say."

The old man didn't move. Layfon admonished himself for almost getting out of hand in his anger, while using Kei.

"Such a regret. It would be good if a strong person like you had been born in my city. But, you weren't born in Schneibel. You grew up in Grendan, and were given up by Grendan. That shows that Grendan has too much strength to fight fate with, or maybe you can't be saved, unable to surpass this fate?"

"Did you say Schneibel.....?"

Though Layfon had decided not to listen to anything the old man said, he still hadn't missed that name.

That was the name of Nina's hometown.

"Did you know the Captain from before?"

"Hum, it seems like this old man has talked too much. Though, it's all the same. I obviously recognize her, because my name is Gildred Antalk."

"Antalk....."

The same family name as Nina.

"Nina is from the same family as I."

"Then you shouldn't be doing this, hurry up and go help the Captain....."

During the time that the two confronted each other, Nina's battle with the giants had already begun. Layfon felt a powerful flow. The ordinary Nina couldn't possess this wave of energy no matter what.

Layfon had only heard Nina speak of it, but this was the Haikizoku's power.

Still, to fight against three aged phases must be too difficult.

"Don't make me repeat myself!"

Gildred should have also seen that fighting, but the old man didn't move a bit.

"If she can't overcome that level of enemy, it shows that the being who pushed her into this fate has no talent for choosing people. At that time, our long-cherished wish will be covered by the clouds of fate. What she needs is not tenderness, but harsh trials."

"How can that....."

Was this something to be said about a family member?

No, perhaps it was? Layfon thought of when he fought against his adoptive father in Grendan, thought of the fierce actions that Lucia put in front of him when he had left Grendan.

He thought of when he had been rejected by Leerin.

Even if they weren't from the same bloodline, they were still each other's family members. But, perhaps they weren't anymore, or perhaps it hadn't changed. Toby and the others had written letters to him. However, even if they still had contact with each other, he already didn't have any way to return to Grendan, and as Lucia pointed out, he was someone who had been coldly banished from Grendan.

Then, did this old man have tender feelings in his heart?

Tender feelings towards Nina.

Even if he did, Layfon couldn't understand them.

If he did..... If he meant well for Nina by not helping her.

Still.....

"Then, what I have to do still hasn't changed."

Correct, his mission hadn't changed. Layfon repeated these words in his heart.

"I'll defeat you, and then go help the Captain."

"What an unreasonable youngster."

The old man's pressure increased. This feeling was completely different from when he fought Layfon earlier.

No, it was this.

This was the old man's pressure when he had fought with the aged phase.

Then, had he only been playing around earlier?

No, he had felt that this degree of power was sufficient.

Though Layfon felt angry at this, he didn't lose his calm. This kind of small thing didn't even need to be mentioned, as the pressure that suddenly burst out before his eyes made Layfon raise the Adamantium Dite, assuming the stance of Successive Bursts.

"You technique-using youngster, planning to defeat this old man with strength?"

"....."

Layfon didn't respond to his opponent's words.

His answer was on his blade.

Perhaps because he had guessed Layfon's thinking, Gildred showed a fearless smile.

"Alright, then I'll fight."

The color faded from the golden Kei released from Gildred's body. The old man's body was dyed black, as if the light released from his body had changed him to a shadow.

The shadow raised two iron whips.

"An impulsive youngster should be crushed by brute force."

The shadow's remarks flew towards Layfon.

Very fast, and moreover so quickly. Layfon repressed his restlessness, taking the moment to split his Kei into countless pieces and form them together into Composite Blast.

When Gildred had charged into attacking range, the strong Kei pressure almost scraped Layfon.

Layfon was patient. However, the pressure continuously pushed Layfon back. He absolutely could not be swallowed by this pressure. But, if he continued to wait, his stance would become stiff.

No, it didn't matter even if it became stiff. Layfon leaned his body forward, defying the pressure, while collecting the Kei of Composite Blast.

He released energy, storing it.

Up until reaching the critical point.

Up until the moment Gildred's iron whip was touching his body. For this strike, Layfon hadn't wasted half a second to gather Kei for Composite Blast.

Then, Gildred's figure arrived in front of him. His iron whips were raised high above his head, seeming to want to strike the iron whips downwards in a cross.

The target of the cross was Layfon's left shoulder. This movement made Layfon feel that Gildred was a little bit naive. Was it because he knew Nina, so the old man thought he couldn't kill him, and so had shown mercy up until this moment?

It didn't need to be said!

Layfon shouted in his heart, and at the same time released his blade.

External-type Kei, Composite Blast variant - Compound Flame Cut.

In a breath, Layfon swung the huge blade that the Adamantium Dite had become upwards. The sword drew a line cutting through the center of the iron whips' cross. But, he had not yet completed his goal, only locking against the two iron whips.

In that brief time, the strengths of the two clashed against each other.

But, this time was truly brief. The balance of strength could not be maintained, and Gildred's Kei was victorious. The Kei that collided at the point of contact exploded. The Kei techniques lost their form, and the blast of pure energy scattered in all directions. The force of the explosion did not only hit Layfon, meaning that Layfon's Kei was close to Gildred's level.

Still, Layfon had been defeated in the contest of strength.

The pressure of the explosion fell like rain, charging towards Layfon, whose entire body had left the ground because his body reacted and flew outwards.

Being thrown halfway into the air by the blow, Layfon urgently maintained his

own consciousness. While he did this, his right hand that tightly gripped the Adamantium Dite suddenly felt nothing. Since it was unable to bear the burden of Composite Blast, it had been destroyed.



As Layfon flew through the air, he felt regret. The situation of the Dite being unable to endure Layfon's Kei power and breaking had occurred many times. But, Layfon felt that before the Dites had broken he seemed to always be using techniques.

This meant that what was happening around Layfon was quite urgent, but also very dangerous.

(Sorry.)

From another side of the feeling of his Dite breaking emerged the faces of Harley and Kirik, and Layfon apologized to the two of them. However, Layfon was also confident. He was confident that if it were those two, there would definitely be a day when they would be able to create a Dite able to sustain Layfon's entire Kei.

"So, right now.....!"

Layfon fully grasped the consciousness that he had almost lost, slowly releasing the handle of the Adamantium Dite in his hand.

Layfon pretended to faint, while confirming Gildred's movements. His opponent did not pursue him here. Did he believe that Layfon had passed out?

No.....

Layfon was confident that his blade had at least brushed against his opponent's body, and that even if the tip of his blade had not touched his opponent, Composite Blast should have penetrated the pressure of the explosion to strike the old man's body.

If he himself wasn't even confident, then he would have no way of fighting at all.

And in order to know the secret that Nina hid in her heart, he had to let himself be confident in his body's ability as a Military Artist.

Then, Layfon began to fall.

In the moment before he fell, Layfon let his body that he had deliberately relaxed fill with Kei.

He once again restored the Shim Adamantium Dite, and then.....

"What do you think you're doing?"

Gildred's figure was next to him.

Either his tactic of deliberately fainting had been seen through, or the old man had caught up to attack. Facing the figure whose golden pressure swayed, Layfon raised the Shim Adamantium Dite to block the iron whip striking towards him.

He blocked it.

Upon closer inspection, the old man's body that exuded golden Kei was stained by a crimson spot. Just as Layfon had been confident in, a part of his Kei had hit the old man.

"After losing to my skill, you turn to petty tricks? How idiotic!"

"Even if it's a petty trick I'll still use it!"

Even if the old man had been injured, the strength in the iron whips was still fairly heavy, and Layfon went down on his knees.

"I'll use any means!"

Layfon used his Kei.

The handle of the Sapphire Dite that he had released recently was at Layfon's feet, next to the place where he knelt. Being trained in the use of steel threads by Lintence meant that Layfon could use any part of his body to pour Kei in to the manipulation of the steel threads.

"I've been sent away because I knew nothing too many times!"

That moment, the steel threads that had been scattered all around the city moved together.

"Nu"

Gildred attempted to back off from his position.

However, he was too late.

External-type Kei variant - Sougenkyouku Madan.

Regardless of Gildred's strength, at that time he was unable to avoid the

thrusts of the steel threads coming from all directions. The surprise attack also kept him from using his full Kei power to defend.

Even so, the paths of almost all of the steel threads bent because of the golden Kei, uselessly piercing through the air.

However, there were still a few steel threads that penetrated Gildred, and Layfon detonated the Kei in the steel threads that entered the old man's body.

"Ugh!"

This move was a technique used to destroy filth monsters from the inside, but the old man's body had not become that way. This was because Layfon who was at his limit was unable to fully pour his Kei. More importantly, even if it were Gildred who had been pierced by the steel threads, his body's defense could not permit this kind of thing happening.

Gildred fell to his knees.

The golden Kei lost its color in front of Layfon's eyes, and returned to the Kei of an ordinary Military Artist, slowly losing its radiance.

"Even if it were a petty trick, it was performed brilliantly."

".....Are you serious?"

The old man's rapid loss of power surprised Layfon instead. Using only that degree of Kei, even if he couldn't instantly heal the wound, he could at least stop the bleeding, and allow the damaged tendon tissue to heal, to where his body would be able to move. The steel threads had not pierced his Kei vein, and had not destroyed it.

In fact, it should be Layfon who had suffered more severe wounds from that initial trading of blows.

"Hum, don't tell Nina about this."

"How would I..... Your body's already like this, why do you still do these things?"

"Because this is fate. Youngster, you wouldn't understand. You wouldn't understand the sorrow of having the successor to my family that I protected become like this. Even if this is a dead end that must be traversed, you still

wouldn't understand."

"That....."

Layfon attempted to refute it, but he closed his mouth.

Not only was he unable to win against this old man in language, he also lost regarding the motives behind their actions as well as regarding their reasons.

".....Perhaps you are right."

But, Layfon didn't want to admit his powerlessness. Perhaps it was willfulness, perhaps selfishness. If the situation turned towards a bad direction because of this.....? Layfon felt afraid just by thinking that way.

"But, if you tell me not to do anything just because of that, I still can't agree. There should be a place where even I can help."

Layfon didn't want to be rejected by the people next to him again.

"What a willful youngster."

The old man mumbled this. He seemed to not be trying to stand up.

"But, hah, oh well. Let this old man see what you can do. But once you get in the way, I'll kill you."

A genuine killing intent perfused his words. If Layfon wanted to take action he could take advantage of the present, but although Layfon had this kind of thought, his body didn't move. Perhaps it was because the old man was Nina's blood relative. But the more important reason was, although the old man's body was covered with wounds such that he couldn't even release his Kei, his spirit still oppressed Layfon. Layfon seemed to see the strong will and determination that he himself lacked.

Thirdly, Layfon's own body was also covered with wounds, and his self-awareness had become dull.

It was unknown what the old man thought of the stilled Layfon, as he simply stared at Layfon without moving.

But, activity stirred in the surroundings.

The ground under Gildred's feet collapsed. The tubes composing the

machinery began to loosen, surrounding Gildred as if they wanted to protect him.

"Whatever happens, fate will continue on. Perhaps you will only be able to taste your own powerlessness."

"....."

The old man said this as he was being received into the cave formed by the tubes.

Layfon didn't respond with anything. He only healed himself with internal Kei as he watched the scene of the old man completely disappearing.

Since Gildred had disappeared, he had no need to be constrained.

Right now he had to go help Nina.



Nina had also noticed that behind her, two powers of Kei were in intense conflict.

However, she had no time to confirm this situation.

Before her were three giants, with gigantic bodies and keen movements that didn't fit them. Nina's evasive leaps back and forth in order to not be surrounded by them were already very tiring.

To be able to throw one of these things, to defeat one in the blink of an eye, her great-grandfather's power was really incredible.

"Ku!"

One of the giants raised its fist, and Nina leaped high up the moment before the fist caught her. The fist crashed into the ground, shaking the city. Nina was by the elbow of the giant that was near the ground, and in a breath she ran up the arm charging upwards.

Her target was the giant's shoulder.

Nina dodged the hands that the other giants extended out, while this giant

also raised its arm at the same time. This movement almost made Nina lose her balance because her body shook, but in the end she still reached the shoulder, and once again jumped.

"Haaaaa!"

Aided by the power of the Haikizoku, Nina used the recoil of External Kei to increase her speed of descent. She flew towards the giant's forehead, pouring Kei into her iron whip.

External-type Kei variant - Lightning God's Hammer.

Nina let the Kei erupt from one of her iron whips, increasing her speed even more using this means, and struck at the giant's forehead with the other iron whip.

A shockwave bearing strong Kei penetrated the giant's body, and its body tilted.

Nina leaped up high, jumping from the giant that had lost its balance to the other giants.

Her projected destination was near the head. After the giant quickly grabbed at Nina's position, it swept a jab towards her. The center of the fist struck at Nina, and she was too late to use the recoil of external Kei to change her path.

Even so!

"Uoooooooo!!!"

Nina turned her whole body upwards, raising the iron whips high, and hitting the fist with both iron whips at the same time. Shockwaves spread from the site of the fist and iron whips' clash. As she was pulled by the strong wind produced by the shockwaves, Nina twisted her body to gain control over it, landing on the fist.

Then she began running.

Nina did the same as before, landing a blow on the giant's head, and then breaking away, flying towards the other giant.

In order to not get surrounded, and also to not let herself simply evade back and forth, Nina felt that this was her best method of fighting.

However, the giants' stamina was seemingly endless, and they were very tough. Even if they were struck once or twice, there didn't seem to be any changes.

Moreover, considering the powerful regenerative ability of filth monsters, Nina couldn't help but feel that her attacks were of no significance.

"Damn!"

Nina flew through the air, while feeling anxious.

What was the situation of the conflicting Kei behind her?

And before that, what was the pressure that gushed out from underground?

"Do I even need to think about that?"

It was Layfon. Layfon who had woken from his unconsciousness, had definitely come to the surface.

Then what had he done? Clashed with Gildred?

Nina was confident in Layfon's power. But, somehow she couldn't feel that Layfon could win against Gildred's overwhelming power.

Then, what had happened to him after all?

He couldn't have.....

"I don't have time to think now.....!!"

But, Nina still couldn't help but think about it.

It could be said that if she thought about that idea, it would cause her to make errors.

However, that wasn't all of it.

Perhaps the giants were waiting for the balance of the battle to collapse. Nina's midair battle, with the giants unable to catch her, and Nina unable to completely defeat the giants. Could it be that from the point where they had judged that this would be a protracted battle, the giants had been waiting for this change? If Nina kept repeating the same actions, her reaction time would decrease at some point.

Moreover, Nina already had no time to notice the situation behind her.

It was at that moment.

"Wha-!"

Nina let out that kind of voice.

Then, Nina felt that she had to respond somehow, but because she couldn't decide whether she should use Kongoukei or external Kei to change her path of flight, she was a second too late.

The giants were transforming in front of Nina, no, they were disintegrating.

They disintegrated, and then transformed. The giants' figures became something like sand in front of her and gathered together.

They became countless lances.

Not only the giant in front of her, but also the other two giants that were attempting to surround Nina.

"Shit!"

At the same time as she spit out that word, Nina chose Kongoukei. She had no way to evade all of those lances. However, she didn't know if she would be able to get through this wave of attacks. Was she able to block the rain of lances with the mass of the three giants?

No, she had to block them.

Nina wrapped her arms around herself, compacting her body.

She had to get through this.

No, that wasn't right.

In order to find a clue, Nina who was at her limit dug through her memories for a clue.

Hurry up and think, when Layfon had first shown her this technique, what had she been doing? Nina dug through her memories, trying to find a clue. Her arm hurt. This was obviously because she had not mastered the technique, though something about this bothered Nina.

When striking a hard object, the power of the strike would always bounce back.

Could she push this effect to its limits?

Nina pondered. But, Nina wasn't Layfon. That moment, she couldn't think of how to change this technique into a different form.

"Yah!"

She had no time. Nina used her Kei with all her might, letting Kongoukei cover her body.

Afterwards, the rain of spears fell from the sky.

Every lance was as large as a weapon that an ordinary Military Artist would use.

However, they numbered in the hundreds, or maybe thousands, and a truly uncountable amount hurtled towards Nina. Flame spewed from the end of the spears, as they attempted to pierce Nina, and the rest of the spear shaft emitted smaller flame for altering its trajectory.

Nina's Kongoukei stopped them. The spears whose paths were not deflected by the Kongoukei were stuck in the barrier and their propulsion died out with no way to pierce Nina.

Nina's figure was buried under countless spears, becoming a pincushion. The flames emitted from the front portion of the pincushion came in contact with each other, becoming a surface of flame.

The ball of spears became a burning ball of flame.

"Gu, uu....."

Nina who was stuck in the middle could only endlessly endure.

Kongoukei was that kind of a skill. Confident in her own Kei, confident in her training, her body braved the enemies' attacks.

Endure.

She would endure.

Nina's willpower pervaded the layer of Kongoukei covering her body, allowing

her Kei to pour through her body. The countless spears before her. She couldn't be afraid of being pierced by them. Fear would lead to cowardice, and cowardice would become thoughts of escaping. Once the idea of escape came up, Kongoukei would lose its intrinsic nature.

What waited ahead was death.

Her heart didn't fear it. When he had first taught her Kongoukei, Layfon had told her about the move's original user, Reverse. This person had the mentality that Nina strove to maintain.

With Reverse whom she had never met as her target, Nina maintained her rigid heart.

Finally, the wave of thrusting spears ended. The flame disappeared, with the appearance of a pincushion reemerging, and it once again began to fall downwards.

Nina who had been pushed into the air by the force of the spears fell as well.

The moment before she began falling, Nina had released external Kei to change her falling location in order to get away from the spears.

However, the Kei she emitted was quite weak, and the effect on her path was also minute.

"Ha.....Ha.....Damn"

It was the consequence of enduring the huge mass of the three giants. Melnisc was also silent, and Nina was unable to stop her body's strength from leaving her.

Because she was paralyzed, Nina landed on the ground defeated. She tumbled on the ground, and her face also hit the earth.

"Damn! Hey, Melnisc!"

(Yes, understood)

Melnisc's voice was unfazed. However, the strength that returned to her body was not like the Herculean strength it had been previously. Did that mean the Haikizoku didn't have endless strength? Every organism had its limits. After perceiving this obvious truth, Nina only felt stunned.

However, this limit occurred at this moment.

Not only the Haikizoku, but her body was also this way.

"Damn, move!"

Nina reclaimed some of the strength that flowed from her. However, she still couldn't move her body from the ground.

She felt impatient.

She had gotten through the rain of spears, but had only gotten through the rain of spears and nothing more.

They had not been destroyed.

"Ku"

Just as Nina thought of this, the enemies began to move. The spear shafts emitted flame, and the spears that had scattered in all directions stood up on end.

Perhaps as a final burst, the spears that stood up together once again sprayed flame and rushed into the air.

However, not all of the spears had done this. Some of the spears stayed down, shooting straight at Nina.

Nina brandished her iron whips to bring them down. Although only some of the spears had attacked, their numbers were still great. They hadn't attacked from all directions at the same time, so Nina was able to continually bring them down. But, this made Nina feel that she had instead fallen into another trap.

Nina was able to continually bring down the spears, but she noticed that as she did this, the speed at which the spears arrived seemed to coordinate with her speed of drawing back the iron whips.

In other words, the enemies had purposefully let Nina bring down the spears, and their goal was to keep her there.

The true attack was.....

"From above....."

However, Nina was unable to escape the dangerous environment. The spears

that followed her movements continuously shot out, and if she tried to escape, her defense would become disorderly, and Nina would be pierced by the spears trailing her steps.

Nina experienced Vati's killing intent with her own body. She who was staying in Zuellni attempted to kill Nina, attempted to eliminate the person who knew her true form.

But, why had she tried to conceal her true appearance?

Vati had used the battle in Grendan to arrive in this world, and hid her true self. In the end, what was she trying to do by doing this?

"Kuuu....."

Nina didn't know the answer, and could only helplessly look at the spears that poured towards her from above.

Then, that scene greeted her eyes.

She saw the scene of those spears suddenly being disturbed.



External-type Kei variant - Sougenkyouku Nagigumo.

The steel threads that he had been unable to recollect at that time became an unknowing good fortune. When he had used the steel threads that he had scattered throughout the city, many of them had relaxed while he weaved the formation, so he was able to use Lintence's advanced skill, Sougenkyouku.

The steel threads that Layfon released scattered the rain of spears that was about to drop on Nina's head, stopping them from changing their direction.

"Captain!"

Nina's whole body was transfixed by the change in situation into Layfon running towards her. The spears that had been swept away by the steel threads fell around Layfon one after another, but Layfon was the one who controlled their falls. He almost fearlessly rushed to Nina.

"Layfon, are you alright?"

"We have no time for leisure, let's leave this place first."

Saying this to Nina who was intertwined with peace of mind and confusion, Layfon grabbed her arm and helped her stand, then put her on his shoulder. Layfon had seen in a flash that Nina had put her Kei vein in a state of extreme fatigue from using too much Kei.

"Sorry."

Layfon's situation had not improved much either. Layfon had only plugged the wounds he had received during the battle with Gildred using internal Kei, and he really had only just changed from having his whole body covered with wounds.

Even so, he still ran while carrying Nina.

"Layfon, what happened to my great-grandfather?"

Nina asked this. Saying that, she also confirmed that Gildred had not lied.

"....."

The moment her gaze crossed with Layfon's, Nina noticed that she had let it slip, and her expression twisted.

(Aha, so it was that way after all.)

Layfon and Felli had made many predictions. In the beginning, it had only been Felli's sixth sense. Grendan's battle had not yet finished, and Nina had some kind of connection to this event, but it had only been speculations. However, Layfon and the others were quite sure that Nina had something she was concealing from everyone, so they tried to find the truth.

The situation that happened in this city was proof that what Layfon and the others believed was true.

But at the moment, Layfon had the feeling that he had confirmed that his thinking was true.

Nina's expression said everything.

"He hid somewhere in this city, I think he should be fine."

But, for now Layfon only said that much.

The difficulties in front of him didn't let him continue pondering.

"First, we need to think of how to deal with them."

Layfon had also seen the giants changing into countless spears. During the first wave, Layfon was too late to support Nina. But, luckily Nina had gotten through it, and Layfon had enough time to recover to the point where he could move, and had weaved the formation of Sougenkyouku.

When he finished, from then onward Layfon was able to start Nagigumo at any time.

Layfon's side had completed their battle preparations.

Layfon had already lost his Adamantium Dite, moreover he and Nina's bodies couldn't fight with their full strength.

For now, Layfon let Nina's hidden secret and Gildred's words out of his mind.

At the moment, there was only a life-or-death crisis here.

Failing to get through this battlefield was equivalent to losing everything.

"We have to survive."

"Ah, got it."

Nina's voice replied to him.

Layfon listened to her voice, while at the same time looking at the disintegration of the spears stuck in the ground, which became a great amount of white sand-like substance, and separated into three groups.

They became solid, and once again returned to the form of giants.

Each aged phase had a different form, and Layfon knew these had acquired a form that was able to change a great amount.

However, he had never expected that there would be filth monsters that could change into anything in the world. At least among the aged phases that Layfon had seen, there were none that could morph from one form to another.

An aged phase that could change its form at will, and moreover three that

were the same. If the one that Gildred had fought was the same kind, then that made four.

Layfon thought of the abnormal filth monsters that had attacked Zuellni ^[2], which had been a group of filth monsters with a unified appearance.

Was this group of giants the same after all?

Right now that kind of thing didn't need to be said. Though Layfon thought this way, he still pondered involuntarily.

If they didn't defeat them they would have nothing. What he was thinking now could wait for after they managed to survive.

Layfon tried out releasing the steel threads while the giants morphed, but they simply passed straight through the giants' bodies. Perhaps when their form was not yet in a fixed shape, it was impossible for an attack to affect them.

As they had no shape, the opponent should have no way to attack this side. Otherwise, the attacks carried out by this white sand form would be far too troublesome.

How could they defeat the enemy?

Layfon pondered this while waiting for the giants to finish morphing.

However, the giants didn't finish morphing.

".....What happened?"

The giants gradually took shape. The white sand swelled up like a mountain, and slowly took the appearance of a giant mud doll ^[3].

But, their morphing speed was very slow. Layfon and Nina had seen the speed at which the giants had changed into spears, so this kind of slow change made the two feel that this situation was out of place.

More importantly, after the white sand turned into its mud doll shape, it even seemed like it had reached a standstill. Layfon understood that the sand in this mud doll form was moving and undulating under the surface. But, this manner of movement didn't seem like movement that could let the giant form.

"That's strange."

"Yes, what's going on? It's as if they're waiting for something....."

Just as Nina mumbled this in a low voice.....

"Ah.....!"

Layfon unintentionally shouted out.

The mud dolls moved. However, it didn't indicate that they were preparing to continue morphing into giants.

"They've started to collapse."

The mud dolls gradually collapsed in front of the two of them. After losing the strength to maintain their form, the sand began to crumble, returning to the form of a mountain. Afterwards, they began to flow outside the city as if they were being blown by the wind. In the blink of an eye, the giant mass just now had disappeared from the area.

".....Is it a trap?"

The tense atmosphere not yet released, Layfon had no way to confirm Nina's low mumble.

The two people stood back to back, staying alert to their surroundings.

However, the only thing that surrounded the two was a pointless feeling of tension, and there wasn't as much as a trace of an enemy around.

"Were they actually real.....?"

Nina mumbled this, but Layfon still wasn't careless in the slightest as he looked in all directions. Just then, he saw a sparkling, glowing object drawing close to himself and Nina.

(Captain, Layfon.)

This voice allowed the two of them to let out a breath. Even if they knew they couldn't be careless, their faces showed a happy expression.

It was Felli's Psychokinetic flake.

(Just now there was unexplained Psychokinetic interference, but it's already stopped now.)

"Where are you now? No, what about the enemies? Felli, do you have any way to confirm?"

(If what Captain means is the enigmatic creature before you guys just now, it's already dissipated. Though there's still a portion that can be followed, right now it continues to dissipate outside the city, so more than eighty percent of it appears impossible to track.)

"That means....."

(Yes. At this stage I can't confirm if this empty city is dangerous.)

".....Is that so."

After deeply exhaling a breath of air, Nina said this.

(.....We need around three hours before we arrive at the empty city. The Captain's protective suit seems to be in a damaged condition, so we plan to first send you a protective suit.)

"Ah, I understand, sorry. If Felli still can't confirm the enemies, then this place shouldn't have any dangers. Though, we'll still confirm again."

(Sorry to bother the Captain.)

(Don't make me worried, stupid.)

Just as Felli was about to turn off communications to Nina, another voice butted in.

It was Sharnid.

".....Sorry."

(Really. A great guy like me is gonna go pick you up, don't fall in love with me now.)

(Stop your wishful thinking and move faster.)

Dalshena coldly ignored Sharnid's joke.

"Haha."

Nina laughed.

Was he being overly suspicious? Her laugh sounded like it had a bit of

sadness.

She was also pained.

Perhaps that's how things were.

Epilogue

After the end of the normal curriculum, Vati mixed in with the students exiting the school building one after another, walking through the Academy City. There were people everywhere talking about trips or chatting about trivia, and these voices mixed in with the disorderly sound of the students' footsteps.

The female students next to her were talking about what store they would go to next, though at the moment Vati walked on the road alone. Other than on holidays, Vati worked every day for Meishen's shop, so Vati right now didn't have anything she really wanted to do.

Vati murmured in a volume low enough for no one to hear.

Her low murmur didn't have any meaning. It was an error caused by integrating into human society..... In other words, she mumbled in order to act as a human. However, Vati didn't think she had any reason to deliberately correct this error.

Her low mumble used a speed faster than sound to communicate with her reconnaissance troops. Her reconnaissance troops replied that the objects to be destroyed still existed, and asked to continue their task.

"No, you don't need to do that. Please retreat, and return to your original task."

The reconnaissance troops couldn't make any further objections.

Vati confirmed that the reconnaissance troops had retreated.

The reconnaissance troops had perfectly accomplished her desired objective, and they had examined her opponents' unknown combat power.

Though her operation to secretly get rid of Nina Antalk had not succeeded, it wasn't important. Vati judged that to continue to disturb the interpersonal relationships of this city wasn't efficient.

"The situation is good up to now, next is....."

Vati pondered the events after this, pondered the final goal for which she had come to this Academy City. Vati primarily pondered something that had nothing to do with battle plans, and in human terms this goal would be a 'private affair'.

However, Vati already didn't have anything she could take the initiative to carry out. She had exhausted the things she could do that wouldn't disturb the interpersonal relationships of the people in this Academy City, and that wouldn't make the Academy City feel any external stimuli.

The miniature garden that protected this Academy City wouldn't allow it to feel threats from external enemies.

Other than that, Vati was only an observer. Moreover, in the first place, her goal was to observe.

"H, Hey-"

Long before she had called out, Vati already knew who the other party was. But, she hadn't stopped her footsteps and turned her head.

The person there was Mifi. In order to distinguish herself from the group of students after school ended, she made small hope while waving her hand. Every time she hopped, her hair that was tied into two ponytails would swing up and down.

The person next to Mifi was Naruki and the one hiding behind the two was Meishen. Meishen, who also recognized Vati, showed a shy smile towards her direction.

"What is it?"

"It's nothing much, Vatti. I saw you so I called out."

Mifi's cheerful voice made Vati tilt her head. That her body could show a doubtful action so naturally was evidence of her normal mimicry functions.

"Vatti, do you have plans right now?"

"No, nothing in particular."

"Then, do you want to come walk around with us to see if there's anything

good to eat? Ah, I should squeeze in some coverage of gourmet, so I'm looking for companions to share calories with."

"I see, are there no problems with me coming along?"

Mifi's proposal made Vati look at Meishen.

"Nn, if it's okay....."

"I understand."

An additional item was added to today's itinerary.

"Ah, since we have a woman with a big appetite, we don't need to be worried about not being able to eat it all."

".....Wait a second, you couldn't be talking about me?"

"It's not important. I'm sure that Nakki can definitely eat more than us three put together."

"Ohh? Is this something you say around a coworker of your friend? I see how it is."

"Awawa, wait a second, Naruki-san, we should talk things over. We should act according to how people always say to avoid evil fights. Right, how are things going for you?"

"Hm, I have the feeling that I won't be satisfied unless I hit you a bit, so first let me hit you some and then let's talk.

"Ya-- male violence!

"Who's a man!"

"Then female violence."

"Okay, let's go to the lake first. Let me show you the terror of human depth charges."

Mifi squeezed through the crowd to escape, and Naruki chased after her.

Vati who had been left there looked at Meishen who had also been left behind.

"Is it alright not to stop them?"

"This is normal."

"Is that so?"

From the expression on Meishen's face and her words, Vati judged that this wouldn't be any big trouble, so she walked with Meishen.

"Right, Mifi-senpai just called me 'Vatti', did she perhaps forget my name?"

"That's because Mi-chan likes to give people nicknames."

"Is that so?..... However, doesn't that mean pronouncing it takes longer?"

"Yea"

Meishen showed a puzzled smile. Vati thought about how to explain.

"If you wanted to shorten my name, I think 'Va' would be somewhat more appropriate. Should I propose this to Mifi-senpai?"

"Th, that's....."

In order to quickly propose her recommendation to Mifi, Vati prepared to chase the two. Meishen seemed like she would be left behind, so Vati held Meishen's hand, jogging together to catch up.

In order to continue her observation, this city had to stay peaceful.

Vati needed this kind of peace.



The sunset dyed Nina and himself red.



"....."

Layfon felt that he should say something, but he didn't say anything.

After Felli had cut her communications, the two people had sat down. Though this was because the two were using internal Kei to heal their wounds, the more basic reason was that they didn't want to move.

Thinking that Gildred was still hiding in this city, perhaps the two of them should have no leisure to squander time in this place. But, since Felli's Psychokinesis had reached this place, there should be no more dangers around that could escape her eyes. Right now Layfon wanted to let her handle everything and stay where he was without doing anything.

".....So tired."

"Yeah"

The words that were squeezed out of his mouth with difficulty were only these.

Layfon was truly tired.

Perhaps there were other words that he should say. If it were now, perhaps Nina would tell him. Other than Layfon, there were no other people here. No, Felli's Psychokinesis filled the whole city, but, it should be right to inform her. No, if his conceited manner of expression didn't matter, then in order to rely on his and Felli's strength, it shouldn't be a big deal to say the truth. If some horrible event was going to happen, his own Military Artist ability and Felli's Psychokinesist ability would definitely come in handy.

"....."

But, Layfon didn't say half a word. Nina sat on the ground the same as Layfon, and Layfon could only gaze at her back figure sitting in front of him.

The sunset was behind her. Her back was illuminated by the evening glow, seeming as if she would be taken away by the atmosphere of the night.

Why would he have this kind of feeling? The answer was simple.

Because she hadn't said anything. Everything that had happened here was the continuation of the battle in Grendan, and Nina who had somehow been

involved in that battle was the core of this event. Gildred was a member of Nina's family, and those giants and the group of abnormal filth monsters that had attacked Zuellni had similarities.

The battle that had just happened here was a battle to train Nina.

Nina was the core of this.

Moreover Layfon was not permitted to enter that core.

"Even if you aren't involved in this, fate will continue on."

Before Layfon could think of something to do, this sentence stopped him. It echoed inside his chest, bringing him pain. Leerin's face emerged in his heart. When she had pushed Layfon away, she had her head down. And when she raised her head, a cold gaze ran through Layfon.

Was it only Layfon's willfulness that he had expected something in that moment? However, regardless of how Layfon thought, he felt that at that time Leerin had shown that kind of gaze in order to rub out her feelings.

Perhaps he should confirm this step by step.

He couldn't just blindly speak of his heartache.

"Captain."

".....hmm?"

"I won't ask."

"Huh?"

"What I want to know, I'll go find out by myself."

"Layfon....."

"What I want to do, I'll do by myself."

Nina turned her head, her figure still illuminated by the sunset.

But, Layfon already didn't feel that she looked like she was about to disappear.

"If something tries to stop me, I'll fight it with all my power."

Layfon declared this.

This was a declaration of war for Layfon.

Against something, some being unknown to himself, something holding a power completely unknown to him - he declared war.

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ See Volume 11 To Conquer the Phalanx!
2. ↑ See Volume 12
3. ↑ Essentially, an approximately humanoid shape (legs, torso, arms, head) with no distinguished features.